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# Ramana Ashtottaram

96. ओं अविच्युतनिजप्रज्ञाय नमः

om avichyuta nija prajnāya namaḥ

Prostration to the One who never swerves from Self-Awareness

Lord Siva, who is absolute Awareness, and his 'son' Muruga, who seems to engage with the world, are in substance one. Skanda does not swerve from self-awareness; rather he shares it with others in order to enjoy all the better that sole Awareness. Absolute Awareness is beyond all categories, it is all-transcendent *ananda*. Relative awareness is awareness of awareness, joy of mutuality, a stirring, a movement, a ripple. The ripple, the movement, the relativity is only an appearance, it exists only for Valli, Muruga's first consort, and for her benefit. Valli is only the human manifestation of the divine Devasena, Muruga's second consort, as Muruga is the human manifestation of Subrahmanya.

*Mey* is the outer truth or the body, as *unmai* is the inner truth or the spirit. There was a visible, living body moving before our eyes like a father, mother, child, master, teacher, friend or patient. This body, this *mey*, was used by Bhagavan as a medium with which to perceive the world and help others to perceive it aright. All this is not swerving from, but fully experiencing and exercising, his *nija prajna*, his self-awareness, as the 'I-I', all *atman*, seated in all beings. (*Bh. Gita*, X. 20).

Bhagavan is and functions as the heart of all mankind and all the world. The world was and is in him; but he was not in the world. Only his body was. The universal becomes available to each one of us as a unique possession when we see our own inmost Self in such a manifestation. Bhagavan sees all of us and the whole world as himself. The devotee sees in Bhagavan his own Self.

# The Law of Karma

The law of karma should not be mistaken for retribution. The law in principle describes the impersonal forces of action and their results. Action is infinitely varied. No two actions, no two moments in time are the same. Each moment is unique. What is consistent throughout each and every action is the indubitable fact there will be a consequence, whether it is sooner or later is secondary to the primary act. The law is meant to give us guidelines, not deliberately punish us.

The universe is a mixture of three catalysts called *gunas*, *sattva*, *rajas* and *tamas* which describe the mechanics of karma. Sattva uplifts our consciousness; rajas institutes action per se and is neutral while tamas invites ignorance and weakens our consciousness.

We have a choice between patterns of behaviour and thought and feeling, between habits that lead to happiness and understanding or misery and enslavement to the whims of an ignorant mind and heart. Happiness is the result of a pure mind that cultivates peace and harmony, it lets go of negativity and resentment. Misery moves in the opposite direction: it nurtures antipathy and anger. It corrupts the mind and heart.

If we cling to a thought through ignorance it produces a corresponding emotion. The only way to remove a toxic thought is to stop feeding it. As we have learnt from Bhagavan thought has no reality in itself. It is dependent on an illusory sense of I. Our ego is a distinctive conglomeration of thoughts and emotions. It is a jumble of impressions and memories. We are engulfed by thoughts and emotions through unconscious identification.

Our task, our *swadharma* or duty to ourself, is to not identify with ignorance but to remain centred in pure awareness. If we do not engage with negativity, it has no fuel and will cease to exist in time depending on the strength of the original thought. The potency of residual thought (*samskaras*) depends originally on the intensity of our karma, that is, our original actions and their consequent results. Who would inflict pain and suffering on oneself? Only a blind fool.

It is important to realise that our thoughts are things which affect us. Thoughts are not wisps on the wind that come and go without influencing us. According to the strength of the thought we become impregnated with its quality. That is why it is so important to associate with the right people. We not only are what we eat but also who we communicate with. We crave the company of great souls because we know by their close proximity either their physical presence, or remembrance, something of their magic rubs off on us, nourishing our souls.

The universe is composed of consciousness of which the material world is a compelling façade. Matter responds to the power of our thoughts. Our will (*iccha*) directs energy. If we are to walk the path Bhagavan shows us, it requires steely determination and commitment. The deeper our dedication, the more energy there is that influences our destiny. And the greater consequently, will be the impact on material events. For no action we initiate is an isolated occurrence. It summons a reply from the universal ground of energy which corresponds precisely to the dynamism of the energy behind our original thought.

The thread which binds action and reaction in our existence is what we term the ego, or *ahankara*. By definition ahankara means the concept of individuality. The consciousness of the ahankara ensures

that a person's actions will entail personal consequences, whether sooner or later is according to the vigour of the energy involved.<sup>1</sup>

It is imperative that we are aware of our intentions, our thoughts and emotions. We should appraise carefully the reply of Swami Yogananda Paramhansa to the following comment: "It seems unfair," a disciple lamented, "that we should be punished for mistakes that we made unintentionally, without realizing they were wrong."

"Ignorance," replied the Master, "doesn't alter the law. If a person drives his car absently-minded into a tree, his resulting injuries won't be fewer because he was absent-minded."

"You must learn to adapt your actions to the law. As Sri Yukteswarji remarked once to me, 'The cosmos would be fairly chaotic if its laws could not operate without the sanction of human belief.'"<sup>2</sup>

On the face of it our position seems hopeless. If we believe in reincarnation we have undergone innumerable births and accumulated untold mountains of karma. How can we possibly be free of all the consequences of these actions committed wittingly and unwittingly?

We know that those who were in tune with the physical presence of Bhagavan felt a supernatural manifestation of Grace and we can still experience this today in a much more subtle way. Bhagavan jokingly replied to a desperate visitor seeking his Grace that he was drowning in it. The implication being that if we would but keep still (*summa iru*) we would know that we are immersed in Grace.

Error, mistakes, sin, ignorance, lethargy, you name it, we face a challenge that is seemingly insurmountable. Like Arjuna on the field of Kurukshetra we can easily be downhearted by the vast array of enemies. Yet, who was on Arjuna's side apart from his brothers and their small group of allies? It was Lord Krishna.

It is of crucial importance that we realise clearly and unequivocally that quantity does not equate with truth. A belief is not necessarily

<sup>1</sup> Ahankara from the verb-root *kr* meaning action; plus *aham* meaning 'I'; literally "the 'I'-maker". See *A Concise Dictionary of Indian Philosophy* by John Grimes. Indica Books, 2009. p.36.

<sup>2</sup> *The Essence of Self-Realization*, (The Wisdom of Paramhansa Yogananda), recorded by Swami Kriyananda. Sterling Paperbacks, New Delhi, 1998. p.69-70.

right even though many believe it. Any accumulation be it knowledge, money, power does not necessarily make one happy. There is the common illusion nowadays that statistics explain everything. Reducing everything to quantity elucidates nothing. More is not necessarily better but it does have the ability to confuse us as the conflicting impressions dance in our brain. Whatever is essential is not dependent upon multiplicity to support it. Consider how one person, Sri Ramana Maharshi, has influenced so many and all because of one instantaneous and permanent realisation that death was unreal.

One transcendent thought, one divine emotion, one heart-to-heart meeting with an enlightened being, has the power to revolutionise one's life. One second and all our previous history is reduced to the weak semblance of ash. We have all at various times encountered a vexatious problem that no matter how much we try, how much we learn about it, nothing seems to work. And then all at once in a blinding flash of revelation we see all the pieces and, akin to a miracle, it no longer bothers us though we may still suffer some consequences. Why? It was not the number of incidents, it was the realisation that they have no independent reality. They are all dependent on our identification. When we enter a dark room and switch on the light, the darkness disappears. Where did it go? It went nowhere because it never existed in the face of light.

Though our *samskaras* can momentarily impede our journey they can never, unless we allow it, hold us indefinitely in their grip. By our devotion to Bhagavan we have tasted a something that elicits an immediate and unequivocal 'yes' which cannot be erased. It is not a thought that engulfs us — it is a living entity within us glowing with light that inexorably pulls us to its centre.

That is why we listen to Bhagavan's words and study his life. For here was someone who entered that light and never came back, at least not as that lad called Venkataraman. All our facts, all our accomplishments, all our good and not so good deeds are reduced to irrelevancy. And that is because our intimate relationship with Bhagavan is valuable beyond compare. Nothing else comes close to that exquisite sense of satisfaction. We cannot explain it. We can

only live it. If we remained focused on that, nothing can defeat our purpose in life to be liberated.

It seems we are all fools one way or another for ignoring or rather forgetting again and again our purpose. The recognition of this is the beginning of our redemption, the turning round of our attitude and the active purification of our minds and hearts. The crucial question then is how?

There are two ways: the gradual and the sudden. To use a metaphor, a 'piece of karma' is like a concrete block. We are stuck with it. It weighs us down and affects our outlook and behaviour. It is an impediment that skews our judgment and which causes further ill-advised action. By sanctioned ritual, prayer such as mantra, pranayama, healthy living, positive thoughts, meditation we can gradually whittle away the block. It is a slow gradual process that erases the burden of ignorance or *tamas* with purifying action.

The second method is to find the origin of the inert density, to seek the thread that caused it in the first place. By seeing how it arises one cuts off the fuel that causes it to exist. To do that Bhagavan offers us self-enquiry: "To whom does this thought arise?" By this sharp and powerful probe we disengage from that which we previously assumed was ours and let it go by no longer feeding it with our time and energy.

Bhagavan describes it thus: "As long as there are impressions of objects in the mind, so long the inquiry 'Who am I?' is required. As thoughts arise they should be destroyed then and there in the very place of their origin, through inquiry. If one resorts to contemplation of the Self unintermittently, until the Self is gained, that alone would do. As long as there are enemies within the fortress, they will continue to sally forth; if they are destroyed as they emerge, the fortress will fall into our hands."<sup>3</sup>

By the law of karma we will be repeatedly assailed by the results of our actions. There will be misgivings, there will be suffering, there will be confusion but of this there is no doubt: Bhagavan's Grace will triumph. ▲

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<sup>3</sup> *Who Am I?* §15.



D. Thiyagarajan



# The Self as a Gooseberry in the Palm of the Hand

V.S. KRISHNAN

Around the 8th Century, when dark clouds of ignorance overshadowed this land, spiritual values had declined and the people were looking for direction and guidance, a powerful spiritual leader emerged from the South, like the sun radiating brilliant rays of knowledge. He was Lord Siva, embodied as man, descended to earth in order to light the lamp of jnana. He manifested as a guru to the whole universe (*jagadguru*) and a guru for all time. He revealed the truth as expounded in the Vedas and the Upanishads. Renouncing the world as a young boy, he soon realized his identity with Brahman itself. Being ever established in the non-dual Self, he became the very embodiment of Advaita, the philosophy that he expounded. He dispelled the prevalent wrong notions of religion, condemned various schools of spurious thought and brought about an unmistakable

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spiritual awakening among the people of India. This remarkable personage was Adi Sankara, the Acharya who lived a few short years, but whose glory will be extolled as long as humanity lives.

Following his initiation into *sannyasa* by Govinda Bhagavadpada, Sankaracharya embarked on an extensive pilgrimage of the land. In the course of his pilgrimage (*digvijaya*), he visited many temples of importance and composed immortal verses on Siva, Vishnu, and a host of other popular deities. He was jnana personified. Attracted by his philosophy and captivated by the divine power that radiated from him, many admirers and followers flocked to his feet and sought his blessings and guidance. There were renowned scholars like Mandana and Bhaskara who challenged him for debate on Advaita, the importance of karma, etc., only to be vanquished.

There were a few who were particularly inspired by the Acharya's philosophy. Eager to cross the turbulent ocean of *samsara*, they came to him and sought to serve him as his disciples. Among them, four stand out by virtue of their dedication, discipline, devotion and knowledge. The first and foremost of them was a brahmin named Sanandana, who hailed from the land where the river Kaveri flows. It is said that the waters of the Kaveri have the unique power of awakening intense spirituality in those who partake of them. He came to the Acharya, fell at his feet and said: "I seek your grace. Please be gracious enough to permit me to imbibe the nectar of wisdom that flows from your lips." Full of compassion and recognizing his worthiness, the Acharya accepted him as his disciple. Once, while the Acharya was getting ready to deliver a discourse near the bank of the Ganga, Sanandana happened to be on the other side of the river. When the Acharya beckoned to him to join the group, Sanandana implicitly obeyed his master and, unaware of what he was doing, started walking across the river. Such was the greatness of his faith and obedience to the master that mother Ganga sprouted a lotus as support under each of his steps, earning him the name Padmapada.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ramesam, N. *Sri Sankaracharya*. Ponnuru: Oriental Publications, 1959.

Continuing his pilgrimages, the Acharya reached the city of Mahishmati by the Narmada. This was the hometown of the great scholar and exponent of the ritualistic school of Vedanta, Mandana Misra, whom the Acharya wanted to debate in order to establish the superiority of Advaita over Karmakanda. Legend has it that the boy Acharya used a ruse to literally land inside Mandana's compound when the latter was engaged in a *sraddha* ceremony where a sannyasin's presence was taboo.

Mandana was understandably annoyed and proceeded to shoo him away with taunts and insults. The Acharya took it all in his stride with obvious amusement. After the initial banter, the two agreed to a debate, wagering that the party that was defeated would convert to the other's way of life. A fierce debate ensued, at the end of which Mandana clearly saw the reason behind Sankara's doctrine of the unity of all existence and the illusory nature of the phenomenal world. He realized that Sankara was the embodiment of Siva who had come to help humanity to overcome the bondage of samsara, and willingly followed him as disciple.

Suresvara, as he later came to be known, was chosen by the Acharya as the person qualified to interpret aspects of his teachings through a *vartika* or exegetical work. "A Vartikam is defined as the work which clearly explains what has been said, what has been left unsaid and what has been ill said."<sup>2</sup> Among the other works that Suresvara composed, *Naishkarmyasiddhi* is noted for its comprehensiveness, precision and clarity and as a supplement to Upanishadic teachings. The Acharya appreciated the commitment of Suresvara to Vedanta and also entrusted him with the work of writing commentaries on *Brihadaranyaka* and *Taittiriya Upanishads*.

Then there was a third disciple, a young boy by the name of Hastamalaka, whom the Acharya met while returning from Mookambika, in a small village called Sribali. It seemed that the

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<sup>2</sup> Sastri , Sri A. Mahadeva, *The Vedanta Doctrine of Sri Sankaracharya*, Sri Sadguru Publications, 40/5, Shakti Nagar, Delhi 110007, first published in 1899, second edition 1986. page viii.

young boy was looking for the arrival of the Acharya at his village and, having introduced himself, got the rare honour of accompanying Acharya as his disciple.

The fourth disciple, named Giri, joined the Acharya at Sringeri. He was so devoted to his Guru that he would anticipate in advance whatever the Acharya needed. He found immense satisfaction in serving the Acharya. One day, before beginning his discourse, the Acharya noticed that Giri was missing and waited for his arrival. The other disciples did not like the Acharya waiting for Giri whom they considered their intellectual inferior. The Acharya wanted to quell the pride of these disciples. When Giri returned, the Acharya bestowed instant knowledge and spiritual powers on him. Giri thereupon composed a profound hymn in the metre called Totaka, distilling the essence of Vedanta. He thus came to be known as Totakacharya. It is believed that these four principal disciples — Padmapada, Suresvara, Hastamalaka and Totaka symbolised the four Vedas or the four eternal values *dharma*, *artha*, *kama* and *moksha*.

Now let's look a little more closely at the contributions of the third disciple, Hastamalaka, to our understanding of the basic concepts of Advaita. The residents of his village Sribali were noted for their strict adherence to the principles of dharma. Among the villagers was one Prabhakara, who was much concerned about the strange behaviour of his son. When the Acharya reached the village, Prabhakara went to him along with his 13-year-old son. After prostrating himself before the compassionate Acharya, Prabhakara explained his problem to him. He said that his son, mute from childhood, showed no likes or dislikes and remained totally inactive. He requested the Acharya to see the child and find out the cause of his utter indifference to his surroundings. The boy who also fell at the Acharya's feet along with his father, still continued in that position. The Acharya picked him up and asked: "Who are you? Where are you from and where are you headed?"

The boy's profound response to this seemingly casual inquiry startled everyone present. The young teenager, who appeared so incapable of speech, now spoke lucidly and eloquently in a series

of fourteen beautiful poems. Here are a few significant ones from among those:

“I am neither a human, nor a Deva, nor a Yaksha. I am neither a Brahmana, Kashtriya nor Sudra. I am neither a bachelor, nor a householder and nor a forest dweller. I am not a monk either. I am the Self whose nature is pure awareness. (*Naham Manushyo...*)

“I am that ever existing Self; the Atman, which causes my mind and senses to function, just as the sun causes all movements on earth. I am the Atman that is devoid of all limiting adjuncts, that is infinite like the vast space above and is ever existent. (*Nimittam Manaschakshuradhi...*)

“I am the Self which gives me the consciousness of my existence; the consciousness and the Self being inseparable like fire and heat. I am the Atman which is independent of the inner organs like the mind and senses and yet cause them to function. (*Yamagnynushnavat...*)

“I am the Atman, Self-effulgent, from whose reflection the intellect functions just as the glittering image of the sun is reflected on the water-pots on the ground. I am the Atman, the source of power, which enlightens the intellect, illumines the mind and enlivens the body. I am the ever-present Atman who pervades all objects and yet remains unaffected, just as the vast space prevails all over and yet is untouchable. (*Ya Eko...*)

“I am the reflection of Lord Vishnu, the all-pervading, self-effulgent reality, unchanging like the reflection of the moon on moving water and undiluted like the clear crystal, covered with colourful clothes. I am ever free (*nityamuktah*) and pure (*nirmala*).” (*Upadhau...*)

What a wonderful way of expressing the Eternal Truth, the Self, clearly delineating the oneness of Atman, the light that is the reflection of Brahman, the ever shining Reality! As the boy’s father stood astonished, unable to believe his ears, the boy continued:

“Oh great Teacher, I am one with the Undivided Bliss, free from the six states of infatuation, hunger, thirst, old age and death as also from the six conditions of beginning, continuance, growth, change, decay and destruction. This consciousness of Atman is common to all liberated ones.”

As the knowledge of the Self seemed natural to him like the *amalaka* (gooseberry) in one's own hand, Sankara named him Hastamalaka.<sup>3</sup>

The Acharya then addressed the boy's father: "This boy was born as your son because of his incomplete austerities in a past life. He is clearly gifted with innate Self-knowledge. He has not the least attachment to house or property, nor has he any sense of 'I-ness' with regard to the body. He knows that all objects, including the body, are external to him." The Acharya continued: "It would not be proper for you to keep him here since he wishes to remain detached from all external objects. Let him stay with me."<sup>4</sup> Prabhakara readily consented, and the Acharya took the boy in his entourage and headed towards his next destination.

Later, one of the other disciples asked Acharya as to how, without going through the process of spiritual practices like enquiry, meditation or without receiving instruction from a guru, this boy could attain Self-Realization. The Acharya replied: "Once a highly evolved saint was sitting on the bank of a river when a woman went near him and requested the saint to take care of her two-year-old child as she was going to take her bath. The saint who was meditating did not notice the baby. The baby crawled away and fell into the river. Picking up the dead body of the child, the woman started crying aloud. Taking pity on the mother, the saint used his powers and entered into the body of the child and brought life to it. This woman was the wife of Prabhakara and her child, who inherited all the qualities of the saint, has grown up as a young lad."<sup>5</sup>

During the next few years, the Acharya brought about a spiritual renaissance in the country through his inspired discourses and popular works like *Atmabodha*, *Aparokshanubhuti* and *Vivekachudamani*. However, over the centuries, questions continued to crop up as to

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<sup>3</sup> Madhava-Vidyaranya. *Sankara Digvijaya*, The Traditional Life of Sri Sankaracharya, Sri Ramakrishna Math, Madras 600004, 3rd edition, 1986. p.142.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p.147.

why the mind could not be at peace. Seekers continued to ask why the Self could not be realized even after years of rigorous contemplation.

We are fortunate that Sri Ramana Maharshi, considered the manifestation of the young preceptor Dakshinamurti, has provided us with *the* answer. He said: “What can be easier than Self-Realisation? Is there anyone who is not realizing the Self? Does anyone deny his own existence?”<sup>6</sup> The very awareness of one’s existence by which one says “I AM” is Self-knowledge. “There is nothing to realize afresh. The Self is already there. It is eternally obvious. It is already realized. It is ever present (*nityasiddha*). It is more intimate than anything.” Though a person cannot see his own eyes, he cannot deny the existence of the eyes. Though one needs the help of the senses to see and listen, one need not depend on one’s senses or mind to know that one exists. According to Bhagavan, the consciousness is registering its presence forever. The consciousness ‘I exist’ is ever experienced by everyone. It is only when one is conscious of one’s existence, all other experience becomes possible.

Bhagavan further explains the point. “The Self is the substratum of all selves and is very obvious.”<sup>7</sup> He used the analogy of the woman who had missed her necklace until her friend pointed out to her that it was around her own neck. The necklace had never been lost in the first place. What had already been there was just *discovered* later.<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Self-realization is always there. According to Bhagavan all that is necessary is to get rid of the thought ‘I have not realised’, which arises out of our ignorance.

We may ask at this point that, if we are already realised, how come we don’t know it. We forget that we are ever self-realised owing to the illusion caused by the notion ‘I am the body.’ It is our nagging body-consciousness (*dehatma buddhi*) that obfuscates our real nature, the Self, which is the reflection of Brahman. False identification with the body blinds us and makes us say: “It is difficult to realize the

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<sup>6</sup> Venkataramiah, M., (comp.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, Talk §146.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid. Talk §379.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. Talk §490.

Self". Just as the pure crystal covered with a coloured cloth appears coloured, when the concept of body and mind is superimposed on the Self, the jiva falls into the deep pit of illusion. It is to rescue us from this delusion that Bhagavan repeatedly instructed us to ask ourselves "Who am I?" It is to remove our cloud of ignorance and guide us to the path of Truth that Bhagavan constantly advised us to practise Self-enquiry (*atmavichara*) and taught us the *vicharamarga*. It was Bhagavan Ramana who told us to shift the focus from the outside world of illusion to the inner world of Reality, the Self within, which is Eternal (*nitya siddha*), is Pure Consciousness (*cit*), and is liberated (*mukta*).

The Eternal Truth that we are ever self-realized was first revealed to mankind by the Vedic seers and has since been reaffirmed myriad times by seers like Sankara, Hastamalaka, Ramakrishna Paramahansa, and Bhagavan Ramana Maharshi. It is like the gooseberry in our palm, if only our vision is clear. ▲

## The Names of Lalitha

Ramesh Menon

Immemorial;  
by what can you be gauged,  
who are all there is?  
All life, *Ameyaa*, each death,  
the surging peace beyond both.

You our blinding Soul,  
veiled by hallucinations  
of days and dying;  
you are the breath in the sky,  
*Aatmaa*, the timeless heaving.

The poems are loosely based on the Japanese tanka form of five lines. A tanka is a haiku with two extra seven-syllabled lines. The lines have 5/7/5/7/7 syllables, in that order.



# The Paramount Importance of Self Attention

## Part Twelve

SADHU OM

AS RECORDED BY MICHAEL JAMES

14th February 1978

**Sadhu Om:** (In reply to someone who quoted and asked questions about some ideas of J. Krishnamurti). At times JK seems to be describing the state of a jnani, but what use is that to us unless we are told how to attain that state? He says we should observe suffering, conflict and so on in the actuality of the present moment, but that is not possible, because suffering and conflict, which are second and third persons (things other than 'I', the first person), are constantly changing in the flow of time from past to future, so in the actual present moment there is no room for them. The actual present moment is infinitesimally brief, because it is the fine boundary between past and future, so there is absolutely no room in it for any

Michael James assisted Sri Sadhu Om in translating Bhagavan's Tamil writings and *Guru Vacaka Kovai*. Many of his writings and translations have been published, and some of them are also available on his website, [happinessofbeing.com](http://happinessofbeing.com).

movement or change, or even for the slightest rising the first person. Therefore in the actual present moment only the pure 'I am' can be observed. In effect he tells us to closely observe second and third persons, whereas Bhagavan tells us to have an attitude of indifference (*udasina bhava*) towards all second and third persons – to ignore them completely and to attend only to the first person.

The first sentence of the first mangalam verse of *Ulladu Narpadu* can be interpreted in several slightly different ways, but they all mean essentially the same thing. It can mean, 'If there were not something that really exists [which is called 'I'], could there be any awareness of being [which is called 'am']?' or it can mean, 'Can awareness of being ['am'] be other than what is ['I']?' The words *ulla unarvu* can mean either 'awareness of being' or 'awareness to meditate', so this sentence can also mean, 'Other than what is ['I'] can there be any awareness to meditate [on it]?'

Bhagavan wrote this verse to refute the popular myth in India that it is possible to meditate upon the reality. Initially he wrote only the last two lines, which mean: 'How to [or who can] meditate upon the thing that [really] exists? Know that being in the heart as it is alone is meditating [upon it]'. However, when Kavyakantha saw that this verse had just two lines and all the other verses had four lines, he suggested to Bhagavan that he should add two more lines to it, so Bhagavan then composed the first two lines. The resulting verse means:

If there were not what is, could there be any awareness of being? Since the thing that is, is in the heart devoid of thought, how to [or who can] meditate upon the thing that is, which is called 'heart'? Know that being in the heart as it is [that is, without any thought] alone is meditating [upon it].

The whole of *Ulladu Narpadu* is an expansion of this one basic idea. Self-attention is not meditation in the usual sense of the word, because it is not a mental activity. It may seem that trying to attend to self is an action, but in fact it is simply the effort to make the mind subside. When we attend to anything other than self, the mind rises and is active, but when we try to attend only to self, it subsides and ceases to be active.

## THE PARAMOUNT IMPORTANCE OF SELF ATTENTION

We always know 'I am', so we are always aware of and therefore attending to self, but our self-awareness is usually mixed with awareness of other things, so Bhagavan tells us to try to attend only to self, because such an attempt is the only means to make the mind subside. In fact the mind that tries to attend only to self can never do so, because it is the nature of the mind to attend to second and third persons, which are non-self, but by trying to attend only to self it will merge in its source, our real self, and then self alone will remain to know itself, as it always does.

16th February 1978

**Sadhu Om:** In verse one of *Ulladu Narpadu* the term *ser padam*, which means the connecting, underlying or pervading screen, can be taken to mean time and space, which underlie, support and pervade the appearance of the world. The entire verse means:

Because we see the world, accepting one original thing that has a power that becomes many is certainly the one best option. The picture of names and forms [the world], the one who sees [it], the supporting screen [on which it appears], and the pervading light [of consciousness that illumines it] – all these are he [the one original thing], which is self.

18th February 1978

**Sadhu Om:** The verb *urupadu* usually means to form or reform, because the basic meaning of *uru* is form, but *uru* can also mean *svarupa*, our 'own form' or real self, so in verse 33 of *Sri Arunachala Aksharmanamalai* the term *urupadu viddai* means *atma-vidya*, the science and art of abiding as self. On the other hand *seppadi viddai* means a deceptive art or science, so it can mean any worldly skill. *Katru* can mean either 'learning' or 'one who is proficient', and *ippadi* can mean either 'this world' or 'in this way'. Thus this verse has two alternative meanings:

Arunachala, teach me the art of abiding as self, giving up this worldly delusion of learning deceptive skills.

Arunachala, giving up deluding me in this way [as] one who is proficient in the art of deception, teach me [instead] the art of self-abidance.

**Sadhu Om:** (In reply to a letter). To quote your letter, “I was not able to meditate in the way I had always become accustomed to. In the past, meditation has been an active process of intense effort whereby the ego sought out some elusive ‘I-I’. I now feel less and less able to concentrate within – by that I mean directing my mental gaze inwards towards some subtle centre. In fact, I don’t feel that I understand the term ‘self-enquiry’, which seemed so crystal clear when I started on this path. I recall that once when somebody brought up the subject of kriya yoga, you said something to the effect that you were mystified how ‘action’ could lead to a state of ‘inaction’. This seems to be the situation in which I now find myself. The old idea of meditation being an active process of seeking within seems to have fallen by the wayside – for who is to do the seeking, and for what?”

Self-attention is not to be done with any strain. Any other contemplation may need effort, but though this is called self-attention, it is nothing but a mental rest, relaxing the mind from attending to other things. Though it is said ‘turn your mind towards self’, it is not an action done by the mind. When the mind does not do anything but keeps itself at rest, it is truly attending to self. Since this is an effortless state, how can there be any strain? The mind will have a reaction of insanity or jumping in a topsy-turvy way only if it is strained – that is, if it is compelled to concentrate on any other thing, whether in the name of self-attention or any other meditation.

In our path of abiding in self, the mind returns to its home and takes rest from its adventures in yoga. Though this is called ‘self-attention’, it is nothing but a complete rest of the mind, and if practised, it will not be the cause of what you have complained about in your letter, namely ‘erupting into wild outbursts of anger and violence’. When, after a long period of effort and struggles to do sadhana, one gives up doing sadhana, then and only then does real sadhana – self-attention – begin.

**Sadhu Om:** Bhagavan once said, “They say it is very difficult to stop thoughts, and also that by tapas nothing is impossible, but however much tapas I do, I cannot think a single thought.” We think now that we must strain to withdraw our mind from second and third persons, but in fact we are straining ourselves to attend to them. To rest in our natural state of self-attention is effortless, but it seems to require effort because we prefer to attend to other things. Therefore we need to give up this liking to attend to anything else, because if we do so we will no more be troubled by thoughts. Through *sravana* [studying Bhagavan’s teachings] and *manana* [reflecting on them] we gain dispassion or indifference towards anything other than self, and by *nididhyasana* [contemplation on self] we gain love for self-abidance. Though these seem to be two different practices, they both lead in the same direction.

One of the many new ideas that Bhagavan has given us is that the real guru is a guru only in the view of the disciple. Though others may claim to be gurus, among Bhagavan and his real disciples you will find no one saying, ‘I am the guru’. Bhagavan always used to praise guru as God himself, but when asked who is guru, he pointed to Arunachala. He never accepted worship for his own form, but instead always encouraged people to direct their devotion (*bhakti*) towards Arunachala. When people praised him as the sadguru, he asked, “But who brought me here? It was Arunachala.”

Likewise his disciples will always point only to him as the guru, and not to themselves. Not only will they say that they are not the guru, but they will not even have the slightest feeling that they are the guru – that is the right sign of a true disciple. They will not allow any ‘I’ to rise as an obstacle between any other aspirant and Bhagavan.

When Alexander the Great invaded north India, he was told about a great sage who lived in a cave on the nearby mountain, so he went to visit him early one morning, and found an elderly man dressed in rags crouching at the entrance of a cave warming himself in the morning sunshine. When Alexander asked him what service he could do for him, the sage at first kept quiet, but when Alexander persisted,

saying that he was the most powerful emperor in the world and could therefore give him anything he wanted, he finally just waved his hand indicting to Alexander to step aside in order to stop obstructing the warmth of the sun. If we rise as an 'I' thinking 'I can guide others', we would be standing as an obstacle between those others and the shining of Bhagavan's grace, just as Alexander was standing as an obstacle between the old sage and the warm sunshine.

Bhagavan often said self is the guru, so the guru has always been and will always be with us. Therefore we need not seek the guru, because he is already doing his part, so we should concern ourselves only with seeking our own real self. As Bhagavan said in *Maharshi's Gospel* [Book 2, chapter 2]:

If you seek either [God or guru] – they are not really two but one and identical – rest assured that they are seeking you with a solicitude greater than you can ever imagine.

[...] God or the Guru is always in search of the earnest seeker. Were the coin a dud piece, the woman would not have made that long search. Do you see what it means? The seeker must qualify himself through devotion etc.

The mind can never imagine or understand what work the guru is doing within. If it tried, it would be like someone trying to remember where he was and what he was doing during his grandfather's wedding. Bhagavan was extremely subtle when he answered questions, but here we try to make it as plain and simple as possible. Since his answers were so subtle, we should be careful not to rush to hasty conclusions about what he meant. The answers he gave were not always recorded accurately, and even when they were, we can easily misunderstand the significance of what he said or the reason why he answered as he did.

19th February 1978

**Sadhu Om:** By clarifying that self is not the seer, perceiver or knower of anything, Bhagavan has given a correction slip to many of the sastras [ancient texts of vedanta]. If we had just read sastras, it would not have been sufficiently clear to us that self is not the seer, because

in this regard many contradictory ideas are expressed in *sastras*. For instance, the word *atman* [self] is often used to mean *jivatman* [the individual or personal self], and *paramatman* [remotest, ultimate or supreme self] is used to mean our real self. In Sanskrit dictionaries you will find that *atman* means self, oneself or 'I', but it is used to mean the thought 'I' as well as the real 'I'. The vague and ambiguous meaning of this word *atman* and the various senses in which it is used has created many controversies and became the main point of disagreement between Buddhists and Vedantins.

Bhagavan has avoided all this confusion and the resulting controversies by clarifying that in the sense in which he uses this term *atman* is the sole reality – the awareness of being (*sat-cit*) that shines as 'I am' in all the three states of waking, dream and sleep – and that the ego, mind or *jiva* [soul or individual self] is the thought 'I am the body', which rises and shines only in the waking and dream states. Moreover, he explained that what is seen cannot differ in nature from the eye that sees it, and that self therefore knows only *sat-cit-ananda* and can never know names and forms. As he says in verse four of *Ulladu Narpadu*:

If oneself is a form, the world and God will be likewise; if oneself is not a form, who can see their forms, and how [to do so]? Can the sight be otherwise [in nature] than the eye [that sees it]? The [real] eye is self, the infinite eye.

Since self is formless, it cannot see any forms, and hence it can never be a knower of otherness. Otherness consists of forms, so it can only be known by a form, and hence the knower or seer of otherness can only be the ego, the thought 'I am the body'.

In this and in so many other ways Bhagavan has given us a spotlight that we can shine on other teachings to see what truth may be in them. ▲

(To be continued)



Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj



# The Navnath Sampradaya and Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj

## Part Two

CATHERINE WEISS BOUCHER

According to my Nisargadatta Maharaj translator, Mr. Suamitra Mullarpattan, the Navnath Sampradaya began around the 9th century and was active until the 14th Century. Through correspondence with Mr Mullarpattan I learnt that the first Nath guru was Matchindra Nath who is also known as Matchindranatha or Matsyendranath. He was said to be initiated by Lord Siva, one of the *Trimurtis* (Vishnu, Siva and Brahma), in the science and teaching of Yoga. The second guru Gorakha Nath, also known as Gorakhnath or Gorakshanath, received direct initiation from Matsyendranath. Gorakhnath was an important Nath both in the lineage and in the historical development of yoga in the land of Bharat (India). He established a definitive system, choosing the best and 'purest' techniques of the various religious sects, prevalent

In 1971, a transcendental experience launched the author's spiritual practice and she was introduced to the teachings of Sri Ramana Maharshi. In January 1978, she was graced to sit at the feet of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj. In 2002, she did a study of *Navnath Sampradaya*. Sri Nisargadatta still guides her life.

at the time. He was a spiritually powerful *jivanmukta* (realised soul) whose influence down the centuries has been fundamental. Legend has it that he was responsible for the awakening and rescue of his guru, Matsyendranath, from the clutches of a tantric sect in a kingdom ruled by women. Matsyendranath was immersed in a pleasurable life with the queen of that kingdom. To save his guru, Gorakhnath entered the queen's palace and recited the 'awakening mystic-call' of the Nath sect, which awakened Matsyendranath from his delusion.<sup>1</sup>

After Gorakhnath there were another seven gurus in the lineage: 3) Jalandhar Nath; 4) Kanifa (or Kanhoba) Nath; 5) Charapati Nath; 6) Naga Nath; 7) Bhartari Nath; 8) Revan Nath; and 9) Gahini Nath.

Though the lineage apparently started in the Nepal area it seems to have migrated to western India. I have also found that he is credited to having written some Tantras, among them the *Kaulajnananirnaya Tantra*.

The scholar Georg Feuerstein writes: "As the first of the siddhas, the Tibetan sources mention Luhi-pa (Luyi-pada) who is most probably identical with Matsyendranatha, the teacher of the famous Gorakshanatha...The *natha-siddhas*...deserve to be singled out for separate treatment by virtue of their enormous influence on the development of Yoga."<sup>2</sup> He also writes: "Matsyendranatha, the Lord of fish, probably lived in the early part of the tenth century A.D. He is regarded as the first human teacher of Hatha Yoga and may have been the originator of the Yogini branch of the Kaula School and the Nathapanth (sect.) Nath means master or lord and refers to a Yogi who enjoys both, liberation (*mukti*) and supernatural power (*siddhi*). Matsyendranatha is considered as one of the eighty-four great adepts (*maha-siddhas*) and is known also as Minanatha or Luipa. Luipa can be a short form of Lohipada. He is also venerated as the guardian deity of Nepal in the form of the transcendental bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara."<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See also Eliade, Mircea, *Yoga, Immortality and Freedom*, Bollingen, 1973. p.309-10.

<sup>2</sup> Feuerstein, Georg, *Textbook of Yoga*. Rider, 1975. Chap.10. p.109-10. See also <http://www.shivashakti.com/matsya.htm> A site dedicated to hatha yoga speaks of Matsyendranath.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p.111.

Avalokiteshvara is the Bodhisattva of Compassion, the world protector. As we can see, there are many perspectives as to who exactly Matsyendranath was, but we know that he was pivotal in Tantra, Yoga, and the Natha traditions. How these practices are viewed depends on the perspective of the commentator. From the perspective of my translator friend, Mr. Mullarpattan, Matsyendranath, reveals that in his adventures at the edges of Tantra, his powers of discrimination were clouded and it seems evident to me, that the transformational aspect of Tantra transmitted through the Navnath lineage had the sexual aspects expunged. The movement had a dominant Saivite base with a pervasive *sakti* (energy) element. It was strongly practical and not a speculative, philosophical movement.

On a site dedicated to travel in the Mangalore I find mention of Matsyendranath. "...Goddess Mangaladevi who is enshrined in a temple at Bolar built in the tenth century in memory of a famous princess of Kerala who is said to have accompanied Matsyendranath, the protagonist of the Nath cult."<sup>4</sup>

Eventually, this lineage made its way down to the west of India, flourishing in Maharashtra. In *Mysticism in Maharashtra*, R.D. Ranade (himself a member of the Navnath Sampradaya) writes, "When and how Matsyendranatha and Gorkshanatha actually lived and flourished, it is impossible to determine. But it remains clear that they cannot be unhistorical names. Behind Matsyendranatha, we have mythology, but after Matsyendra, we have history..."<sup>5</sup>

Professor Ranade also makes it clear that the Natha lineage flows right into the ocean of the Maharashtrian Saints, like Jnanadev. He writes, "It is certain that Nivrattinatha and Jnandeva came from the spiritual line of the great Gahininatha, as more than once authentically evidenced by the writings of both Nivratti and Jnanadeva themselves. That Nivrattinatha was instructed by Gahininatha in spiritual knowledge, that Gahininatha derived his spiritual knowledge from Goraksha and Goraksha from Matsyendra, it is needless to reiterate."<sup>6</sup>

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.udupipages.com/temples/mangaladevi.php>

<sup>5</sup> Ranade, R.D. *Mysticism in Maharashtra*, Aryabhushan Press, Poona.1988. p.19.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.19.

I was informed by Mr. Mullarpattan that Gorakhnath purified the spiritual practice, jettisoned complicated, empty rituals, and recommended and enhanced the path of *raja-yoga*. The purpose of this yoga was to purify the mind which leads to its liquidation or neutralisation. This in turn resulted in pure consciousness bereft of ego-individuality. Subsequently the pure consciousness subsides into *nirguna parabrahman* (the formless transcendental reality).<sup>7</sup>

Of the nine Natha gurus, it is with the eighth guru, Revan Nath, (or Revananath) that the modern Navnath Sampradaya begins. My correspondence with Mr. Mullarpattan who had explored deeply the Nath tradition reveals that, “Revan-Nath, who as an infant was discovered on the sandbeds of the river Reva [Narmada River].”<sup>8</sup>

Revan Nath (also known as Revananath or Kadha Siddha) established the still active Kaadsiddheshwar temple and math on the heights of the Siddhagiri hills, at Kanheri village, Kolhapur district of Maharashtra. With Revananath there was a bifurcation of the lineage, and Gahininath was the last of the recognised Nath gurus of the original tradition.

It was Revananath who established a new lineage which today finds its fullest expression in the Inchegeri Sampradaya. After him came the following gurus: 2) Kad-Siddheshwar Maharaj; 3) Guru Lingam-Jangam Maharaj who was also known as Sri Nimbargi Maharaj (ca.1789-1875); 4) Sri Bhausahab Maharaj (1843-1914); 5) Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj (1875-1936); and 6) Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj (1897-1981).

Mr. Mullarpattan tells me that the first two gurus of this new tradition were not householders, but renunciates. There is an account of Revananath meeting Dattatreya and Matchindranath, “One day while engaged in agricultural work he had the vision of Sri Dattatreya and by his grace he attained *mahimasiddhi* (occult power) on the basis of which he had performed several miracles. Therefore he became famous as ‘Revanasiddha’ in that region. After sometime,

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<sup>7</sup> Personal correspondence.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

Matchindaranath paid a visit to that region. Owing to the occult power tiger, lion and other such wild animals forgetting their enmities were found to be with Matchindranath. On seeing this, Revananath was flabbergasted. Revananath realized that his *Mahimasiddhi* was of no help. This could be accomplished by *Brahmajnana* (realisation of God). According to his wish Matchindranath took Revananath to Sri Dattatreya. Sri Dattatreya initiated Revananath into spiritual life and Revananath spent some time in penance under the guidance of Sri Dattatreya and Revananath realized God...”<sup>9</sup>

Although the sequence of events and the flow of time is obviously not that clear, there is a definite spiritual connection with Dattatreya and the Navnath lineage. We know that after Revananath there was a guru called Kad-Siddheshwar Maharaj, though this guru could be Revananath under another name. Since he began what is called the Muppin Muni tradition, he is also considered the first Kaadsiddheshwar (*kaadh* means ‘jungle’). To add to the complexity surrounding his name he was also known as Muppina Muni. Whatever his name he was undoubtedly a seminal figure of the Navnath tradition.<sup>10</sup>

About this sampradaya Sri Gurudev Ranade remarked: “This may be called *Swarupa-Sampradaya* — a Tradition of ‘Self-Vision’, which has been adopted since ancient times by seers like Narada, Yajnavalkya and others up to the modern times by saints like Jnaneshwar, Tukaram and Sri Nimbargi Maharaj.”<sup>11</sup>

From Revananath the lineage then passed onto Nimbargi Maharaj. K.B. Dabade writes: “The saint of Nimbargi was born in 1790 in Solapur (Maharashtra) but spent his life in Devar Nimbargi, a village

<sup>9</sup> Dabade, K.B., *Sociology of Religion: a Case Study of Nimbargi Sampradaya*. Mangala Publications, 1998. p.50.

<sup>10</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kaadsiddheshwar> retrieved 13.10.2014.

<sup>11</sup> *Silver Jubilee Souvenir: Pillars of Sri Gurudev's sampradaya and Heart-homages to Sri Gurudev*. Vol. 1. ACPR, Belgaum. First Edition 1978. Sri Nimbargi Maharaj was the 23rd Muppin Muni; Sri Bhausahab the 24th. The 25th is unclear. The 26th received the title at the age of seventeen. Later he received *atma-jnana* (Self-knowledge) from Sri Siddharameshwar Maharaj.

in Bijapur district (Karnataka). He belonged to a Neelawani sub-caste of Lingayat caste. His surname was Misalkar and Narayana or Nagappa was his horoscopic name. His disciples used to address him as Narayanrao or Bhausahab. He was also known as Gurulinga Jangam Maharaj which was in fact the name of his Guru (the spiritual preceptor). But he used this as his ensign, in the songs composed by him.”<sup>12</sup>

Virasaiva or Lingayat affiliations were and are prevalent in Karnataka and western India. In the introduction of Sociology of Religion of the Nimbargi Sampradaya we find an explanation of the Virasaivist movement. “Veerasaivism is a twelfth century reformist movement in Karnataka led by Basava – a charismatic leader, and his followers. The core of Veerasaiva teachings is its refusal to recognize the principle of ritual pollution and purity, basic to Brahminical Hinduism. The biological processes such as birth, death, menstruation, spittle and *jati* (caste) cause ritual pollution necessitating segregation of persons for a fixed period before purification is effected. Veerasaivism proclaims non-observance of five kinds of pollution. Veerasaivism does not recognise ritual pollution and in practice it is considerably diluted. Veerasaivism refuses to make a distinction between auspicious and inauspicious occasions on the ground that the Linga emblem of Siva knows no pollution.”<sup>13</sup>

Lingayats wear a lingam on a chain, they need no other external representation of the deity. It is significant that some of the founders of the Navnath Sampradaya are Lingayat or Virasaiva which was a revolutionary movement, allowing people of all walks of life, and both sexes to find Siva immanent within themselves. Part of this democratising movement, I believe, is a response of western India’s contact with Islam, which embraces people of all class, creed and gender. The iconoclasm, which is at the heart of Virasaivism actually comes down to us in the twenty-first century as something we can easily relate to. The breaking down of taboos, of certain parts of India’s spiritual structure makes it possible for us as modern people to partake of these teachings. We do not even have to be practising

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<sup>12</sup> Op.cit., Dabade, p.49.

<sup>13</sup> Op.cit., Dabade, p.41.



Sri Nimbargi Maharaj

Hindus, in the traditional sense, in order to hear it. This attitude was most evident in the satsang room of Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj.

Returning to Nimbargi Maharaj, he had a dream, in which Vittal (Vishnu) appeared to him and told him to go to the town of Siddhagiri.<sup>14</sup> He went to the temple where he saw a yogi who gave him a mantra and told him to meditate regularly on it.<sup>15</sup> But he returned home and forgot about it. Realising the negligence of his chosen disciple, the yogi one day came to the house. The guru was welcomed into the house and he asked for two rupees as an offering. Nimbargi Maharaj had to borrow them as he did not have them himself. The guru returned them and said that he should use one for his family life and one for his spiritual life.

Sri Nimbargi Maharaj asked, “Can the worldly be made happy, by meditation on God?” The sage replied, “Nothing is impossible to the grace of God.”<sup>16</sup> This was the start of Nimbargi Maharaj’s practice in earnest. He was a dyer of cloth but he felt that being a shepherd would be more conducive to his spiritual practice. His practice took thirty-six years, from the age of 31 to 67. His life was apparently uneventful, a normal family life. At the age of 67 he became Awakened and turned over his mundane affairs to his son. He initiated people and lived the life of a jivanmukta until the ripe age of 95.<sup>17</sup>

Sri Nimbargi Maharaj says in his *Bodha-Sudhe*, v.14,

Hypocrisy means outward show of meditation on the Self (Atman) while inwardly one is engrossed in thought of worldly objects. We should never entertain hypocrisy because God is omniscient and omnipresent, He knows all. Therefore never try to deceive Him by means of hypocrisy.<sup>18</sup>

<sup>14</sup> *Sri Nimbargi Maharaj (His Life and Teachings)*, Introduction, Despande, M.S., Academy of Comparative Philosophy and Religion (ACPR), Belgaum. 1978. p.2.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p.2.

<sup>16</sup> *Nectar of Illumination: Teachings of Shree Nimbargi Maharaj*, Nimbargi Maharaj; (‘Shree Maharajarawar Vachana’) 1908, 1975. Compiled by Raghunathacharya Adya and translated by S.Gajendragadkar & S.Bhagwat. p.11.

<sup>17</sup> *Op.cit.*, *Nimbargi Maharaj, His Life and Teaching*, Despande, p.3.

<sup>18</sup> *Op.cit.*, *Nimbargi Maharaj, His Life and Teaching, Bodhe-Sudhe*, ‘Hypocrisy’ p.21.



He also talked about not being a burden to others and that one should not be a beggar. He says in v.29:

One should never lower one's hand for the one's needs. If one takes thus from others, one's wants would ever remain unsatisfied. The begging hand would be cursed and polluted. Therefore, one should always have one's hand raised up (for giving).<sup>19</sup>

"Priests and *jangams* [Saivite order of wandering monks] get their hands cursed by their greed for other's property and by lowering their hands for that purpose. They will therefore never succeed in their undertakings; their poverty will not cease and their wants would remain unsatisfied. Therefore, one should not accept from others anything gratis or in charity. One should be giving to others with one's means."<sup>20</sup>

This is obviously a criticism of renunciates who make a big show of their austerity and yet remain attached within. I personally witnessed Sri Nisargadatta's disgust of a swami, dressed in ochre robes with whom he had shared a podium. After the talk, Sri Nisargadatta Maharaj picked up the offerings of money that he had received and placed them before the swami. Later he said that the swami only spoke to feed his belly and needed the money more than he did. One can surmise that this distrust of behaving spiritually ostentatiously and the mistrust of certain kinds of renunciates, were transmitted from guru to disciple and still pervades the sampradaya. It also makes a point that being a householder with interior renunciation was more virtuous than that of a sannyasin who was not inwardly renounced.

Spiritual practice while living the life of a householder was challenging for Sri Nimbargi Maharaj and demanded internal renunciation. In v.16 of his *Bodhe-Sudhe*, he says:

Wife, children and grandchildren, involve us in infatuation and that is known as '*Maya*', (attachment). We should avoid that trap of i.e. temptations. We should not love our children too much. At the same time, we must not fail to arrange their food and clothing. We should behave with them as though

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., 'Do not hold down your hand (like a beggar),' p.21.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p.29.

they are the children of others; if we bestow extra care on them out of selfishness, it will harm them. Getting the way they do, we should not involve ourselves into the trap of their maya-attachment and become partners in their joys and sorrows.”<sup>21</sup>

Sri Nimbargi Maharaj’s approach was to remain detached while in the midst of life. From the modern western perspective, his approach may seem insensitive, however, there is truth in his stance toward family life in as much as one tries to be fully participatory and yet vigilant towards attachment. Perhaps this is a warning against spoiling children, a point that strikes me deeply at heart!

His book of teachings contains advice on how to work, its proper attitude, the danger of idleness, the uselessness of anxiety. He writes this about meditating while working in the world:

“On getting initiated by Sadguru in spiritual life, you should continue to work with hands and repeat the name of God in your mind. Work with your hands, meditate on God Hari, like thread in the spider’s web, watch your breath inhaling and exhaling (i.e. weave name God through every breath, as the spider weaves the web with its thread).

“You should live the domestic life like a labourer, who does his work always with an eye on his wages. In the same way you should work sincerely for the wages, that is, earn enough money to maintain your family, but all the time you should meditate on God. The body alone should be engaged in work while the mind and soul should be completely engrossed in Atman.”<sup>22</sup>

This quote expresses the emphasis of the Navnath Sampradaya, in keeping the focus on the Absolute while apparently engaged in the activities of daily life. The use of mantra was instrumental in keeping that focus, and has been transmitted down through the lineage. In the next chapter we will explore how that transmission continued through mantra initiation and direct exposition of truth. ▲

*(To be continued)*

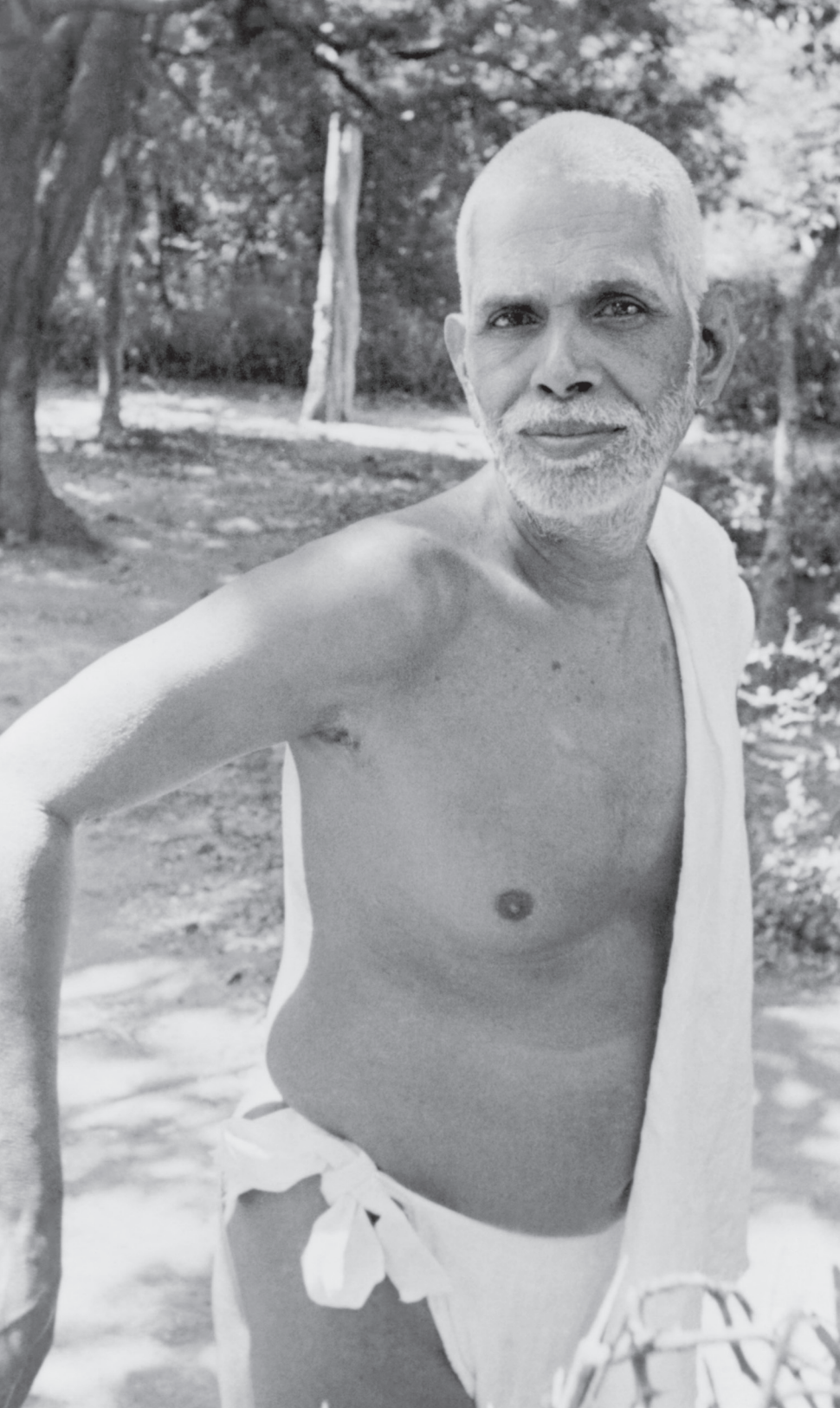
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<sup>21</sup> Ibid., ‘Snare of Temptation,’ p.22.

<sup>22</sup> Op.cit., *Nectar of Illumination: Teachings of Shree Nimbargi Maharaj*, Chapter 49, ‘Meditation while Working with Hands.’ p.84.

# ASHRAM CALENDAR 2015

Sri Bhagavan's 135th Jayanti	Tuesday	6th January
Pongal	Thursday	15th January
Chinna Swamigal Aradhana	Tuesday	3rd February
Maha Sivaratri	Tuesday	17th February
Sundaram Iyer Day	Tuesday	10th March
Sri Vidya Havan	Friday	20th March
Telugu New Year Day	Saturday	21st March
Sri Rama Navami	Saturday	28th March
Tamil New Year Day	Tuesday	14th April
Sri Bhagavan's 65th Aradhana	Friday	1st May
Maha Puja	Wednesday	10th June
Cow Lakshmi Day	Sunday	28th June
Guru Poornima (Vyasa Puja)	Friday	31st July
Sri Bhagavan's Advent Day	Tuesday	1st September
Navaratri Festival Commences	Tuesday	13th October
Saraswati Puja	Wednesday	21st October
Vijayadasami	Thursday	22nd October
Deepavali	Wednesday	11th November
Karthigai Festival Commences	Monday	16th November
Karthigai Deepam	Wednesday	25th November
Sri Bhagavan's 136th Jayanti	Sunday	27th December



## KEYWORD

# Guru

JOHN GRIMES

The word *Guru* literally means ‘weighty’, ‘large’, ‘heavy’, ‘great’.<sup>1</sup> In other words, a guru is great; a guru is one who is extremely great within; a guru is one who is large enough to contain the entire universe. For this reason such a one is called *mahan* (great). Interestingly, a Sanskrit word for the Absolute (*Brahman*) also means ‘great’ from the root ‘br’. This greatness refers to that which is inward and has little to do with qualities or qualifications that are outwardly discernible.

The most oft-quoted etymology of the word ‘guru’ derives from the two syllables ‘gu’ (meaning darkness) and ‘ru’ (remover). Thus the guru is that one who removes the darkness of (the disciple’s) ignorance.<sup>2</sup> Another etymology of the word says, “The first syllable

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<sup>1</sup> Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit-English Dictionary*, p. 359.

<sup>2</sup> *Gurugita*, v.23.

John Grimes is a recognised academic authority on Advaita. He received his Ph.D. on Indian Philosophy from the University of Madras.

‘gu’ represents the principle of illusion and the second syllable ‘ru’ the supreme knowledge that destroys the illusion.”<sup>3</sup> Other ‘creative’ etymologies include ‘gu’ (beyond the qualities) and ‘ru’ (devoid of form). The guru is the one who bestows the formless state that transcends the qualities. Or again, ‘gu’ (to sound or speak) and ‘ru’ (declaring the way to behave). Thus, the guru is the one who speaks the truth.

The *Mundaka Upanisad* says, “A teacher who is established in Brahman is the true Guru.”<sup>4</sup> Adi Sankara’s *Vivekacudamani* describes the true Guru as, “. . . a knower of the Self, who confers freedom from bondage . . . one who is well-versed in the scriptures, taintless, desireless, a perfect knower of the Absolute, continually established in the Absolute.”<sup>5</sup>

The term ‘guru’ generally describes anyone who gives knowledge, that is, one who removes one’s ignorance. Thus, there are dance gurus, music gurus and academic gurus as well as spiritual gurus. In ancient India a teacher who is the spiritual father of a student and was called an acarya.<sup>6</sup> However, in Sri Ravana’s vocabulary, a true guru, a Satguru is a person who has realised the Self.

“Guru is the Self... Sometimes in his life a man becomes dissatisfied with it, and, not content with what he has, he seeks the satisfaction of his desires, through prayer to God, etc. His mind is gradually purified until he longs to know God, more to obtain His grace than to satisfy his worldly desires. Then, God’s grace begins to manifest. God takes the form of a Guru and appears to the devotee, teaches him the Truth and, moreover, purifies his mind by association. The devotee’s mind gains strength and is then able to turn inward. By meditation it is further purified and it remains still without the least ripple. That calm expanse is the Self.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid., v.24.

<sup>4</sup> *Mundaka Upanisad*, 1.2.12.

<sup>5</sup> *Vivekacudamani*, vv.33-35.

<sup>6</sup> *Atharva Veda*, 11.5.3; *Satapatha Brahmana*, 11.1.5.4; *Prasna Upanisad*, 5.8.

“The Guru is both ‘external’ and ‘internal’. From the ‘exterior’ he gives a push to the mind to turn inward; from the ‘interior’ He pulls the mind towards the Self and helps in the quieting of the mind. That is *guru-kripa*. There is no difference between God, Guru and the Self.”<sup>7</sup>

It is said that the Satguru gives three gifts to the spiritual seeker. Bhagavan said, “In the case of the individual soul, which desires to attain the state of true knowledge or the state of *Ishwara* (Godhood) and with that object always practises devotion, the Lord who is the witness of that individual soul and identical with it, comes forth, when the individual’s devotion has reached a mature stage, in human form with the help of *sat-chit-ananda*. These three natural features, and form and name which he also graciously assumes, and in the guise of blessing the disciple, absorbs him in Himself. According to this doctrine the Guru can truly be called the Lord.”<sup>8</sup>

The first gift is the Satguru’s form. From the formless, the Divine takes a form. The form is sweet, enchanting, lovable. The form enables a seeker to relate to, to begin to seek the otherwise formless Self. As each seeker, at one time or another, believes he or she has a human form, so too, the Satguru takes on a human form.

Further, can you think of a form without also thinking of its name? There is an intimate connection between the name and the form it represents. The name is the Satguru’s second gift. As well, it is said that the name is even sweeter than the form. If one thinks of a mango, one immediately becomes happy and one’s mouth begins to water. The word ‘mango’ conjures up an image of a large, sweet, perfect mango. But if one sees a physical mango, all sorts of doubts may arise: “Is it sweet? Will it be stringy? Will it taste oily? How much will it cost?”

The name leads to the form and vice-versa (all of creation is but name and form – *nama* and *rupa*). The manifest universe is but name and form – the unmanifest Truth manifests itself so that one may

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<sup>7</sup> *Maharshi’s Gospel*, Book I, Chap.VII, ‘Guru and His Grace.’ 2012. p.26.

<sup>8</sup> *Spiritual Instruction*, Chap. One, Section 7.

relate to it. The name and form of the Satguru invokes his or her salient features. They are suggestions for contemplation. They are calling cards for kinship. They are vehicles of adoration. They are the Self appearing in the dress of manifestation.

The name chosen is the means whereby one is able to approach the named. It is a means to reach the goal, for the goal is contained in the means. Consciousness of the name leads to consciousness of the named. As one thinks so one becomes. Like a piece of wood that has been placed in a fire, sooner or later the wood itself will turn into fire. Likewise, a mind that is immersed in the Satguru's name will eventually become Divine. The individual (*jiva*) becomes the Divine (Siva) through the Name. The *Chandogya Upanisad* says, "Meditate on the Name as *Brahman*."<sup>9</sup>

The third gift is the activities, the teachings of the Satguru. The life of the Satguru is full of inspiring events and a wonderful tool for the sadhaka to contemplate and emulate. The teachings of the Satguru are given so that the sadhaka may intellectually, and then experientially, realize the Self.

To discover a Satguru, three conditions must be present. First, one needs proximity. There is nowhere the Satguru is not, for the Self is all there is. Bhagavan said, "The Self alone is."<sup>10</sup> Second, there needs to be a willingness to give. Sri Ramana said, "There is nothing to be gained anew."<sup>11</sup> *Praptasya praptih*, Self-realisation is but the obtaining of the already obtained. Because the Self ever-is, It is forever 'giving.' Thirdly, there must be the capacity.

He also said, "The Guru will say only what I am saying now. He will not give you anything you have not already. It is impossible for anyone to get what he has not got already. Even if he gets any such thing, it will go as it came. What comes will also go. What always is will alone remain. The Guru cannot give you anything new, which

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<sup>9</sup> *Chandogya Upanisad* 7.1.5. *sa yo nama brahmety upaste*.

<sup>10</sup> Venkataramiah, M., (comp.), *Talks with Sri Ramana Maharshi*, 2013. Talk\$13 p.7. 7th January, 1935.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, Talk\$63, p.73. 6th July, 1935.



you have not already. Removal of the notion that we have not realized the Self is all that it is required. We are always the Self.”<sup>12</sup>

Bhagavan states, “What is your idea of a Guru? You think of him in human shape as a body of certain dimensions, complexion, and so on. A disciple, after Realization once said to his Guru: ‘I now realize that you dwelt in my innermost heart as the one Reality in all my countless births and have now come before me in human shape and lifted this veil of ignorance. What can I do for you in return for such a great benefit?’ And the Guru replied: ‘You need not do anything. It is enough if you remain as you are in your true state. That is the truth about the Guru.’”<sup>13</sup>

So long as you seek Self-realization, the Guru is necessary. Guru is the Self. Take Guru to be the real Self, and yourself to be the individual self. The disappearance of this sense of duality is the removal of ignorance. So long as duality persists in you, the Guru is necessary. Because you identify yourself with the body, you think the Guru too is the body. You are not the body, nor is the Guru. You are the Self and so is the Guru. This knowledge is gained by what you call Self-realization.<sup>14</sup>

Adi Sankara’s *Vivekacudamani* says, “Rare and difficult are these three: a human birth, a burning-desire-for-liberation, and association with Great Beings, spiritual giants, Satgurus.”<sup>15</sup> Having all three, rejoice and know you are blessed. ▲

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<sup>12</sup> Mudaliar, Devaraja, *Day by Day with Bhagavan*, 2013. p.18. 16- 9-45.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., p.88. 3-1-46 Afternoon.

<sup>14</sup> *Talks*, Talk§282. p.251. 16th November, 1936.

<sup>15</sup> *Vivekacudamani* v.3.



D. Thyagarajan

Lord Arunachaleswara and Apectakuchambika at Deepam 2014

# Ulladu Narpadu Anubandham

Based on Lakshmana Sarma's  
Commentary

Verses Nine to Twelve

S. RAM MOHAN

## Verse 9

That Consciousness of the form of 'I', pure and unmoving which shines in the heart-lotus — that awareness confers liberation when the ego is erased. Know this.

## Commentary

There is only a point of difference between the form of soul which arises as the 'I thought' and *Brahman* (the Absolute). That is, the Consciousness that arises in the form 'I am the body' is really the Self. Whereas the same consciousness, free from the identification with the body, is *Brahman*. Hence it is this identification, taking the form of ego-sense which is the obstacle to the present experience of the state of liberation. So the means of attaining liberation is to destroy the ego by the mind diving into the Heart.

This verse is a translation of verse 46 of *Devikalottaram*.

S. Ram Mohan is on the editorial board of this magazine. He is also the editor of the Tamil magazine *Ramanodhayam*, dedicated to Bhagavan.

**Verse 10**

The body is insentient like an earthen pot. It has no sense of 'I'. Therefore, it is not the true 'I'. The fact that in deep sleep the body consciousness is not there but the 'I' consciousness continues to exist validates this. Who makes this 'I'-ness or ego? Or where does he dwell? In the heart-cave of those who have realised the Self, the Infinite Blissful Arunachala Siva will shine as the *soham* (He-I-am) consciousness.

**Commentary**

We can recollect the steps on the ladder of jnana enunciated by Bhagavan: i.) *Naham deham* — I am not the body; ii.) *Koham* — who am I?; iii.) *Soham* — He is I. The starting point is to recognise that the body is not the Self. It is vindicated by the fact that the body, like the earthen pot, is non-conscious and in deep sleep state, though there is no experience of the body, yet there is awareness of the 'I'. Thus it is established that the body is not the Self. Then what or who is the Self? Through following the path of *vichara* (enquiry) God is realised as the Self (*soham*). It was Bhagavan who composed this verse.

**Verse 11**

Who is the one really born? Only He, who gets born in his source, *Brahman*, by inquiring 'Where was I born?', is really born. He is born (in the Absolute) once and forever. That supreme sage is ever new.

**Commentary**

By the sadhana indicated in this verse, the seeker is born in *Brahman* (Self) which means only that he becomes *Brahman* (though in reality, there is no becoming only 'being'). It is Birth in real sense because it is not shadowed by death as birth in the world is. Since all other worldly births end in death, these births are equal to death. They are limited by Time. The state of the *jivanmukta* (liberated soul) who has won this unique Birth is beyond time. This truth is indicated by the statement that 'He is ever-new'. All that is old was at one time new and became old by the lapse of time; so it is time that causes persons and things to become old through changes wrought by a multitude

of causes. As the jivanmukta has transcended time, he remains unchanged, ever fresh, ever new. “That is, Nature as *Brahman* undergoes no diminution.” Bhagavan composed this verse, in answer to those who wanted to celebrate his *Jayanthi* (birthday).

Verses 12 to 17 have been classified by L. Sarma as *The Adhikari* (The qualified one). Only he who is well qualified to take to the path of *sadhana* can pursue it to the point of success. One who is adept in *sadhana catustaya* (discriminative intellect), possession of six-fold virtues such as equanimity, dispassionate, indifference to worldly attractions, intense desire for liberation is known as an *Adhikari*.

### Verse 12

Give up the idea ‘I-am-the-body’, which is replete with flaws and thereby become aware of Self as Eternal Bliss. On who strives for Self-realisation and at the same time getting engrossed in nourishing the body, is like the one who seeks to ford a river using a crocodile as a float.

### Commentary

The mind that is always attached to the objects of the world is ever turned outward and will not submit to be turned inwards towards the Self or the Heart and hence, it cannot be engaged in the spiritual *sadhana* as instructed by Bhagavan. Of all the worldly attachments, which infect the mind and weaken it, the root attachment is the attachment to the body, due to the identification of the corporeal body with the Self. The ego-sense has the form, ‘I am the body’. The conviction ‘I am not the body but the self’ is the potent means of giving up all these attachments, starting with attachment to body. Attempting to practise *sadhana* without giving up this attachment and sense of identification with the body is aptly compared to the attempt to cross a river, riding on a crocodile, mistaking it for a log of wood. The man who does this will not reach the other shore alive. The latter half of this verse where the simile is employed is taken from Sri Sankara’s *Vivekachudamani*. ▲

(To be continued)



D. Thyagarajan

Lord Arunachaleswara and Apeetakuchambika at the Kalyana Mantapam

# Narsinh Mehta

## An Introduction

MEENA DESAI

*This article presents Narsinh Mehta, a 15th century Gujarati poet, well known within the linguistic community but not beyond. He is a major but rather unique exponent of the Bhakti philosophy spreading through India from the 9th to the 19th centuries in that while his language passed into common culture, he never subscribed to or started any cults and his work remains outside attempts to bracket him within a tradition such as Vaishnavism.*

Narsinh Mehta lived during the 15th century in Junagadh in Saurashtra, the western peninsula of Gujarat. He was born into a Nagar Brahmin family, a sub-caste proud of serving society as administrators, scholars, soldiers, and educators. Orphaned early, he lived with his brother in Talaja. After being taunted by his sister-in-law for being still unemployed when about to become a father for the second time, Mehta left home and ended up praying in a ruined Shiva temple for seven days.

According to legend, Lord Siva granted him any boon, but Mehta insisted he only wanted what the god loved best. In his lyrics, he describes being taken to the court of Krishna to be the dark lord's servant and seeing divine dancing in Vrindavan. Mehta eventually returned home as a devotee desiring to sing songs praising Krishna.

Meena Desai began translating Gujarati ghazal poetry in the 1980s. She has been translating Narsinh Mehta's passionate divine lyrics for 10+ years. Some of her translations are in a new Penguin India publication *Eating God: A Book of Bhakti* edited by Arundhati Subramaniam. ISBN-10: 0670087599.

He settled in Junagadh, with Manek his wife, Shamal his son, and Kunwar his daughter. There he became popular for his kirtans of Krishna, describing the joyous life in Vrindavan, especially Radha and the gopis demonstrating selfless love for the god. His Nagar community found his amorous poetry too explicit, and also publicly reviled him for singing bhajans to audiences of untouchables. Some life events, as recorded in his own poems and later retellings, describe miracles that rescue him from social embarrassment.

For example, when Dixit, a visiting priest, chose Shamal to be betrothed to Ratan, the daughter of a minister in the kingdom of Vadnagar, Mehta suggested faith in Krishna in reply to Manek's concerns about inequality in their status. Their rag-tag arrival for the marriage turned into a wealth-laden, grand event at the wedding that overawed everyone. Another time, his social obligation to honour his daughter Kunwar's expectant mother ceremony was resolved when he silenced her in-laws with everything they asked for, including gold blocks for the rocks that her grand mother-in-law had presumed her father's gift would be.

Once, his critics misled some pilgrims so that he was obliged to write a promissory note to be redeemed in Dwarka, Krishna's capital. Though he had no commercial ties, a merchant called Shamal Sheth, one of Mehta's many names for Krishna, fulfilled the bond and repaid the pilgrims. The last life event described in his poems is a socio-religious-political dilemma when the king, Ra Mandalik the Third, incited by his courtiers, demanded public proof of Krishna's favours to Mehta. After Mehta spent a long night singing bhajans under guard, the audience witnessed the temple garland appearing on his neck. He is believed to have lived in the southern coastal town of Mangrol, home of a religious uncle for another two decades.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> There are many versions of Mehta's life. So the brief summary here is an amalgamation of many sources. His dates are generally believed to be 70 years within 1408-1488 CE but no proof exists. Almost immediately from the time his works became available in MSS around 150 years after his death, his life has been the subject of other writer's works with individual interpretations ranging from poems to plays, film, and TV shows.



Religion, literature, and society, are important. A groundswell of Vedic beliefs in southern India around the ninth century displacing Buddhism and Jainism reached northern India at the end of the first millennium. Brahmin supremacy revived Sanskrit literature at the cost of creating a distance between religion and the common people. Almost simultaneously, there was an indigenous counter current from which the sacred texts became available in local languages. At its center was a resurgence of the idea of bhakti, or devotion drawn from much earlier philosophies. The pursuit of bhakti, an intellectual concept discussed in ancient texts, evolved in parallel with devotion as an approachable means of attaining religious salvation.

Islamic invasions that began in the eleventh and twelfth century also had various impacts. Umashankar Joshi, a prominent mid-twentieth century scholar suggests that when Brahminism defeated Buddhism it was already weakening and faced a strong contender offering simplicity, monotheism, and freedom from scripted rituals or social classification. "In facing this new religion, this country's religious life could not have sustained itself from rituals and reliance on scriptures as much as it did from Bhakti's asylum."<sup>2</sup>

Narsinh Mehta's social origins contributed another unique dimension. He belonged to the Nagar community that claims descent from intermarriage between some Greeks from Alexander's times and Kashmiri pundit families.<sup>3</sup> Their records of southern and westward migration emphasize special abilities in their services to

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<sup>2</sup> 'Narsinh Mehta', in *Gujarati Sahityano Itihas*, Vol. 2, Part, 1, (CE 1450-1650), 2nd Ed. Compilers, Umashankar Joshi et al, Gujarati Sahitya Parishad, Ahmedabad, 2003), pp. 140-197. Note: The quote in translation of the original is my own-md.

<sup>3</sup> The qualifier *nagar* (in Sanskrit and Gujarati) derives from the term *nagar* or a city. As the community spread, there were further distinctions such as *nagar grihastha* (literally citizen householder), *nagar vaniya* (citizen merchant), and *nagar brahmin* (citizen priest). This point is of interest for two reasons. One, the prefix lends credibility to their origins from Greek city-states marrying into the Indian priestly castes, like Brahmins. Two, the suffixes identify social function these communities performed. Later they separated into classes grouped by geography and other elements as well.

various kingdoms: scholarship, aesthetic and linguistic aptitude, administrative and negotiation skills, and military bravery.

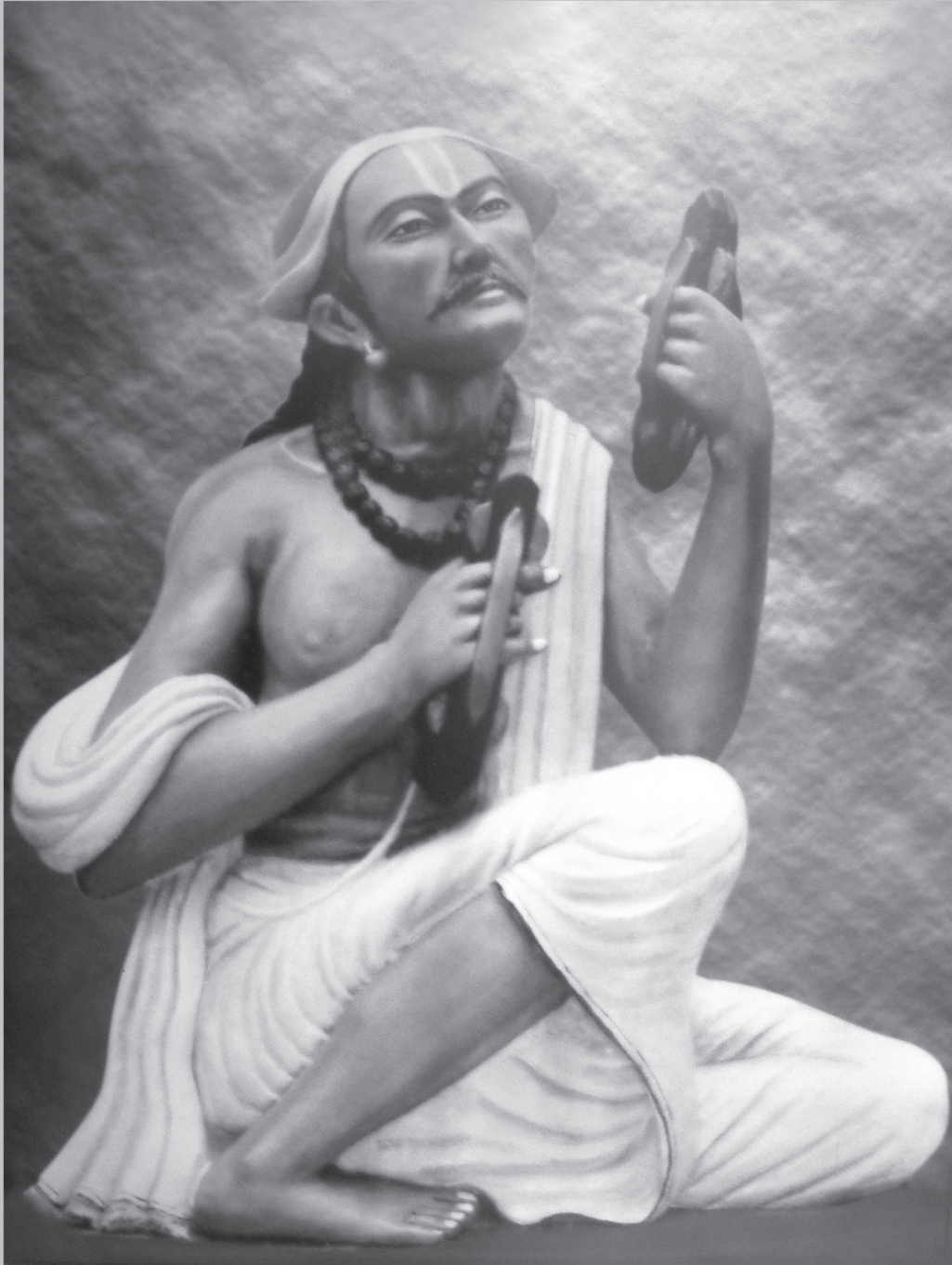
On the one hand this community had made a consistent effort to blend into their new home's social structures; they were creative in adapting to changing circumstances, moving south as needed to preserve themselves and adeptly taking on many different roles as needed. On the other, as a group that had progressively taken on the colouring of their surroundings by maintaining caste and other structures, Nagars had begun to make their stand on their social status, knowledge, and power. Narsinh disregarded social protocols and rituals in his pursuit of joyous songs. He cared not if his cohorts and followers came from all strata of society. Coming from a Saiva sect, he cheerfully adopted the Vaishnavite persuasion in his Krishna bhakti. While the invasions and wars forced the locals to become strict in restricting women's movements and fighting to preserve their religious purity within the social classifications, Narsinh's songs celebrated the equivalent of 'free love', from his view of Krishna's *raslila*, in which every milk-maid or *gopi* had her own Krishna-lover. His most ecstatic poetry spoke about the woman who could scold her divine lover, "Let go my garment, duties at my husband's home are calling me with the approach of dawn."<sup>4</sup>

### Narsinh's Poetic Oeuvre

Narsinh Mehta has always been a poet of the people. To some extent this has had contradictory effects. On the one hand, his language and content come close to human experience in so many ways that people sing his songs or use his phrases without thinking of the man or his talent because the appeal is universal. On the other, he has given so much of himself in his verse that the man and his singular ability to achieve divine union becomes the reason for his being known. It seems that from the earliest scholarship on this poet, his personal experience has overshadowed other avenues of analysis. A certain tendency to hagiography embraces the notion of wise men glorified

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<sup>4</sup> My translation of a theme appearing in multiple songs in different phrasing.



Sri Narsinh Mehta

as saints, sants, or teachers, gurus. This leads to emphasizing and perhaps even elaborating miraculous occurrences and associates their talent with the supernatural or divine.<sup>5,6</sup> A basic clustering his work of more than 850 poems into autobiographical, narrative, and devotional romantic/erotic or devotional spiritual lyrical poems provides entry into his otherwise undated creations.

Mehta's autobiographical works are *jhari na pad*, about an incident when he thought Krishna appeared in the Mohini form to slake his thirst at a kirtan; *putravivah na pad*, describing his rescue from social embarrassment at his son's marriage to a king's minister; *mamera na pad*, in which he gets aid for social awkwardness at his daughter's expectancy ceremony; *hundi na pad*, which tell of a promissory note repaid by divine intervention; and *harsame na pad*, the largest group describing a night-long kirtan praying for Krishna to answer the doubts of the king, Ra Mandlik, that the stories of Krishna coming to his rescue are fakes. One pair of poems tell of his willingness to pray with untouchables, facing community insults, and maintaining his belief that his true supporters are Vishnu-followers.

Mehta's narrative poems include *chaturī*, *sudamacharit*, and *danlīla*. The first set is more lyrical than strictly narrative, illustrating Radha-Krishna love in myriad moods, separation, longing, joyous union. The second two are early examples of the medieval narrative poetic genre called, *akhyān*, telling the story of Sudama, Krishna's childhood friend, forced to visit him at Dwarka's court, because of total poverty. The royal friend divines the need and affectionately rewards his tongue-

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<sup>5</sup> Schomer, Karine, and W.H. McLeod. *The Sants: Studies in a Devotional Tradition of India*. Berkeley Religious Studies Series. Motilal Banarasidass, 1987. Specially notable here is the fact that modern scholarship recognizes Mehta's philosophical point of view as within the tradition but clearly acknowledges his non-sectarian views that produced no cult or followers. Later Vaishnava sects did and do co-opt him as one of their spokespeople.

<sup>6</sup> Virtually all the analyses in Gujarati, even the literary type, fall back on crediting his creative ability sourced through divine gifts rather than his own native genius. This approach has helped preserve his work at the cost of keeping within narrow confines.

tied comrade. The third item, more a cluster than a sequence, shows Krishna playing at demanding a tax from the Gokul milkmaids when they go to sell their wares in town. Narsinh's authorship of the third and some other pieces is now in doubt.

The largest portion of Mehta's poetry, varied lyrical poems, takes Krishna's life and weaves an experiential universe through a feminine perspective, passionate, erotic, playful, and maternal. The poet speaks as the devoted milkmaid, the companion, and the loving mother. Several of these can be grouped by topics or themes: childhood mischief, passion, the spring season, the songs of messages or swinging together. Others tell of scolding, yearning, fascination with his flute or his face, or anklets. The theme unifying all of these is a sense of fulfilled return of passionate devotion. Mehta's poetry celebrated Krishna worship as a successful supplicant. In so doing, his work aligns more with those who celebrated love-centered devotion positively, than with those whose verse portrays yearning for union with the divine.<sup>7</sup>

The last but most well known set of Mehta's lyrics are the *bhakti-gnyan-vairagya na pad*. Literally, these are songs of devotion, knowledge, and detachment. Conceptually, the central themes are spiritual, transcendental, and philosophical comprehension of love and divinity. In these poems Narsinh distilled his life experiences into essentials. Metaphysics shines through the mundane and the poet tells his listeners in many different ways to learn to see and to appreciate the way creation and life, divinity and humanity work in this world.

### His Poetry

A poem singularly illustrating entire range of Mehta's *zeitgeist* is *Kon punye kari nar hum avatari*, "What good deeds gave me birth as a woman?" We must first acknowledge that this poetry is sung. It's full

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<sup>7</sup> An immediate contrast is with Mirabai, his near contemporary and famous Krishna bhakt. In general, her work speaks of longing for the union that Narsinh celebrates as actually experiencing, by letting go his masculine limitation and by intuitively apprehending the divinity within the human soul to be one with the Supreme divinity.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

effect, broad and deep, manifests when the bhajan, the prayer song, receives life in the singing. Still, the word selection ultimately gives the foundation for the powerful impact of the sung/heard experience. Even in the translated text, the image imparts the genuine sense of wonder and awe.

The first stanza sets up the conundrum.

What good karma flows from my past that I am born a woman?

And God Himself courts my favours?

Immortal, inexpressible, beyond understanding,

The Lotus Lord clings to me.

Mehta writes joyously of birth as a woman. What an amazing benefit is it to be born a woman that God Himself politely asks permission to come be with her? No human psychology can account for this situation. The husband of Goddess Lakshmi wants to put his loving arms around her neck!

In the first two lines, Narsinh Mehta takes the idea of an 'avatar' to a whole new level in using the verb form for the feminine gender, 'avatari', to describe 'being born' as a woman. By the fifteenth century C.E, the term 'avatar' to signify an incarnation of Lord Vishnu is a commonly accepted concept, in all parts of India. What does this mean in the context of Mehta's poem? First, instead of just being born, a condition every mortal is subject to, this speaker looks at herself as an incarnation. Second, the term evokes the status of women in that society. She is special while normally women as women are neither special nor important. Her 'beyond the norm entitlement' is located precisely in the fact of her gender. It is because she's born as a woman that the indescribable Lotus Lord, the husband of Lakshmi, goddess of wealth, now is a supplicant before her. She knows that this must be because of some unusual act. What kind of good deed has she done to deserve this?

Having set up the problem, the speaker goes on to work out the question.

Perform rituals, meditation, and penance precisely;

Hari comes not even in a dream.

That same Hari appears most easily,  
When sought with devoted passion.

As far as she knows, the usual methods of achieving the sight of God are to perform ceremonial prayers faithfully, meditate sincerely, and even do painful sacrifices to assert your devotion. But, she knows that even after all such proofs the sight of the Lord is not a guarantee. In contrast, she finds that just because she loves the Lord passionately, he arrives in an instant. The speaker is stunned. Is achieving oneness with God so simple? I love him and He loves me back?

Shesh Nag's comfortable cradle we gain  
In the heavenly palace for our pain.  
Greater than that is my temple; adoringly the  
Yellow-Garbed One comes to my bed.

She has learned or heard that as a reward for good deeds and sacrifice we mortals will be given a place of comfort in the coils of the eternal serpent who cradles vaikunth, the abode of Vishnu. And she realizes, that even more remarkable than such a heaven is her own place her temple as it were, where God visits her. The reversal of the normal, devotees go to the temple and here God comes to the devotee, causes her much wonder.

The Vedic Puranic scriptures declare  
Proclaim him devotee lover. I say,  
Well met are You, Narsinh's Lord,  
Granting me grace, knowing me frail.

At last she begins to understand. All the holy texts, the Vedas and Puranas, always describe God as one who loves those who love Him. Well then, it is only natural. Thus she is able to say, in that case, Narsinh's Lord, I am glad you came to meet me. You knew that I am the weak one and it is appropriate that you should be gracious towards my effort at love.

Whether or not we credit the popular legend that he personally witnessed the *Ras Lila* of Lord Krishna in Vrindavan because of the boon Lord Siva granted him, this poem illustrates that strictly in terms

of his poetic imagination and ability, Mehta here presents an artistic tour de force in celebrating womanhood and love at their highest peak. It is a paean to the feminine principle that reverberates much more powerfully than any feminist tract. Joy is in the celebration of who you are. Here, the male principle of Godhood, Power (Siva or Vishnu) is complete only in union with its complementary other half, then female, the source of Energy or Abundance (Sakti or Laksmi). Mehta's talent thus transcends perceptions of gender limitations that prevailed in his time and that continue in some form even into the twenty-first century.

Narsinh Mehta's work embodies deep philosophy made very approachable in simple yet poetic language. His linguistic skill transformed medieval Gujarati from a vernacular to a successful literary medium and a modern language. His poetic skills deserve an independent exposition to analyze and highlight literary mastery. In this current article I can only invite the reader to appreciate the richness with another few examples.

Whole Universe<sup>8</sup>

Sri Hari, you alone are the universe;  
In myriad forms you appear infinite.  
As soul in the body, you are the essence in the light,  
Living in the void as the word.

You are the wind, you the water, you the earth;  
Spreading support tree-like you span the skies.  
Bliss became Life by the desire to  
Savour countless joys in multifaceted creations.  
Vedas assert, as proved in heard and memorized texts,  
Between gold and earring, no incongruity exists.  
Shapes form, then names become diverse.  
Gold ultimately is always gold.

Garbled texts can tell no truths.  
Each worships the god of his choice.

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<sup>8</sup> First line in Gujarati reads: *Akhil Brahmandma Ek Tu Srihari*.



Truth is what mind, word, and deed confirm  
And the intellect knows intuitively.

You are the seed in the tree and you the tree in the seed;  
The same appears on both sides of the curtain.  
Says Narsaiyyo, in the mind's quest,  
Revelation emerges in loving with love.

### Awakening<sup>9</sup>

Awakening, I look and cannot see the world  
In sleep checkered delights appear.  
Intellect and Soul are engrossed in entertainment  
The supreme spirit flirts with the supreme spirit.

Fundamental elements five, born of the Supreme,  
Atom to atom each stays clinging.  
Flowers and fruits know to be of the tree,  
Nor is the branch separate from the trunk.

Vedas assert this, proved in heard and memorized texts,  
Between gold and earrings no incongruity exists.  
Shapes get formed, only then names become diverse,  
Gold ultimately is always gold.

Life and Joy emerged by their own desire  
Creating fourteen universes, differences they made.  
Says Narsaiyo, you should understand straight;  
Recollecting this, so many sages have been saved.

### Innocent God<sup>10</sup>

Oh so innocent Lord Sambhu, whom whole world praises,  
Your real roots no one grasps.  
Your asceticism claims I know too well.  
What's hidden then in your matted locks?

<sup>9</sup> First line in Gujarati reads: *Jagine Joun To Jagat Dise Nahi.*

<sup>10</sup> First line in Gujarati reads: *Bhola Bhola Sambhu Tamne Viswa Vakhane Re.*

## MOUNTAIN PATH

Some bring the beloved on their back, some by the hand.  
Hidden within your head, Sivji, whence did you bring her?

She's yellow silk-draped and fair of skin.  
Why hide your thievery, Sivji, you're found out.

Deny it, Sivji; I'll untangle your locks.  
If she's found, I'll never call you again.

With ashes you shape your matted locks,  
With such tricks, I'll never slake your thirst.

Pundit of pleasures savouring swallowwort, thorn apple, and  
opium,  
Lord of Narsinh Mehta, you are an old sage indeed.<sup>11</sup>

I choose to end this article with this particular poem to offer a true spectrum of Mehta's worldview. Here he speaks as Parvati, Siva's consort. She has caught the ascetic bringing home another woman, the River Goddess Ganga, concealed in his matted locks. Her fond teasing illustrates the poet's complete understanding of his own early revelation.

What the ascetic Siva loved best was joyous union that Krishna exemplified in his life and so the boon meant taking this human supplicant to the Life Preserver, Vishnu, in his incarnation as the Symbol of Love, Krishna. Mehta's lightly amused language portrays the kind of deep comprehension that forgives foibles with affection as only an enlightened soul or the Supreme can. Appropriately, he chooses the Mother of the Universe, the Female Energy, to voice this Total Love.

This is the same laughing loving spirit animating the lyrical voice of Jashoda, Krishna's mother and Radha/Rukmini, the soul as the confident lover beyond social norms and the equally confident consort who bemoans in one poem that, if one were merely married one could discard the husband, but how to get rid of one you chose to worship in your heart? ▲

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<sup>11</sup> All the translations in this article are my own. At this time the definitive text for the poems is the 1981 edition by S. Jesalpura, *Narsinh Mehta ni Kavyakrutiyo*, Sahitya Sanshodhan Prakashan, Ahmedabad.

# The Finger Pointing to the Moon

D. SAMARENDER REDDY

That one which cannot be understood by the mind but because of which the mind is capable of understanding something is *Brahman*. Understand that alone to be *Brahman*. All other things that are being defined as '*Brahman*' and worshipped are not.

– *Kena Upanishad*.

There is nothing in the intellect that was not first in the senses (*nihil est in intellectu, quod prius non fuerit in sensu*)

– *Empiricist Axiom*.

The purpose of this article is to think through in what sense the above verse from *Kena Upanishad* is true or meaningful. We can safely assume for our purposes that the empiricist axiom stated above is true. In doing so, we are side-stepping the rationalist counter to it that there are certain innate truths that the mind can 'know' merely by its own reflections, without recourse to any experience originating from the world, for reasons which will become clear later on in this article.

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The question now arises, what is 'Brahman' that the *Kena Upanishad* is referring to. One encounters references to Brahman (also called as Self) in the Upanishadic lore, which is nothing but the teachings of various ancient sages who supposedly realized their true nature as being Brahman and not merely the empirical psychophysical body-mind complex. Brahman is the truth whose experiential understanding one has, or the absolute reality or state one awakens to, upon Self-realization, as a culmination of meditative contemplation of one's Being with a silent mind that is not thinking but absorbed in such meditative contemplation. To 'know' *Brahman* is to be *Brahman*. It is this realization of *Brahman* that the *Kena Upanishad* is saying cannot be obtained by the mind. To see why, we need to clarify for ourselves how the mind 'knows' anything.

The English philosopher John Locke opined that the mind at birth was a *tabula rasa* (clean slate) on which the moving finger of experience writes. That has a modicum of truth in that most of our knowledge seems to originate in sense experience, though we go on to refine it into ever-widening conceptual knowledge by the operations of our minds, or by thinking. Even the truths of logic and mathematics, which are seemingly derivable through pure thought without any experience per se, as the rationalists are wont to claim, on closer examination would prove not to be the case because even their basic axioms and concepts have at least an initial basis in experience.

It is a different matter that our minds take the raw data of the senses and spin out far more complex knowledge than seems to be residing in the sense experience. This the German philosopher Immanuel Kant was quick to point out by saying that our minds supply the categories, under which we classify the sense data that is streaming into our minds from the world, and go on to derive the various relations between the sense data.

The Categories of Kant are the general properties that belong to all things without expressing the peculiar nature of any particular thing. Having classified, categorized and related the sense data in our minds, we can then go on to make predictions of unobserved (that is, sense-independent) future states of the world, which is how

science proceeds, from particularities of sense data to the rich tapestry of generalized truths captured in words by thinking and reflecting on the sense data. But even those predictions become reality only when they are verified by actual sense data, either directly or indirectly, that becomes available to us when the future state of the world about which the prediction was made, becomes the present to us with the passage of time. So, in a way the touchstone of knowledge is sense experience.

Take the case of a leaf. We derive knowledge about the leaf through classifying and organizing sensory knowledge. Once I get the sensory data or sensory experience of a thing out there as being green, rough, and rustling in the wind, seen in its relation to the tree as a whole, I might call it a leaf in my thinking and attribute to it properties of greenness, roughness, and rustling sound. But if someone reads my thoughts cast in the form of language about a leaf, he would not be able to understand what I mean unless he recalls to mind the greenness, roughness etc. from the memory of his prior experiences of such properties or qualities, to acquire knowledge.

The word 'green' is not the same as the experience of the colour 'green'. Thought and language, or words and concepts, are merely an attempt to communicate what has been experienced, and are merely conceptual. For a person who has not experienced before the colour 'green', the concept or the word 'green' does not lead to any knowledge about 'green' in his mind. The finger points to the moon, but you should look at the moon and not the finger.

So, in a way all conceptual knowledge is merely symbolic. Hence, any knowledge about *Brahman* or Self captured in words (which is the medium for thinking by the mind) cannot be knowledge, but merely the finger pointing to the moon. You have to experience Brahman or Self yourself to know what it is all about and not expect the words to deliver you such knowledge.

We cannot get knowledge about the Self through thought unless we have already experienced the Self, just like unless we have already experienced greenness through our sense of sight, any words that say 'Leaves are green' will be meaningless to us. Hence, one cannot

arrive at the truth through thinking, though thoughts can point to the truth. Thinking can proceed only with words, and words stand only as symbols for actual entities, and knowledge of entities is only through experience and not through words.

Words are only symbols for entities and their properties, just like a map of Delhi is for Delhi. That is why thinking cannot give us knowledge about the Self or *Brahman*. Or in another words, mind, which subsists on thoughts, cannot understand *Brahman*. That is the rationale for the assertion of *Kena Upanishad* quoted in the beginning. ▲

## Swan

Chris Roe

Preening,  
Soft, virgin white feathers,  
Aware of my presence  
But not of my world.  
Before me, another world,  
No analytic philosophy,  
No targets, budgets or schedules.  
No self-appraisal,  
Or attempt to be  
Something other than  
Just part of.  
Now she rests,  
Head tucked under wing,  
Slowly drifting down stream,  
Among the reeds and dragonflies  
And the trees on either bank.  
I stayed awhile,  
Until the moment was lost  
But not forgotten,  
A picture to place  
Upon this page.

# Thank You God

MITHIN AACHI

I am a Joint Replacement Surgeon by profession. Having heard that Arunachala fulfils all desires to those who circumambulate It with devotion, I had circumambulated It once with fervour and devotion praying for a good practice despite my young age. I also took part in the rare *seva* of Lord Venkateshwara called Vastrabhishekam where the Lord is washed with scented oils for over an hour. In my heart brimmed the desire for a good income and practice.

By God's Will and a fulfilment of my faith my practice picked up. I was happy with my materialistic advancement and life moved on. But the good times did not last long. Slowly the vagaries of Destiny caught up and my practice floundered. I had to put in more effort just to make ends meet. Day in and out I struggled to achieve decent income.

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I experienced a dull phase in my practice and was wondering when it will pick up. I thought it is by God's Will that I had good practice and now by His will only my practice is down.

I decided to take solace in the presence of my Guru Sri Jinnuru Nannagaru.

One day when I went to meet him he was telling a devotee, "Man thinks that by his effort he has become successful. But he doesn't know that it is by God's Will that everything happens."

I thought it was very apt teaching for the type of phase I was going through and decided to tell him my woes. When I met him the next time he asked me, "How is your practice?"

"It's dull," I said.

He looked grave and said, "It will improve."

I thanked him. I waited but the previous income which I used to generate did not happen. I was wondering as to how Sri Nannagaru's words could be wrong.

I met him a few times like that and always complained about my poor practice hoping Nannagaru would turn it around. But the practice just went on in its usual average way.

It was then I came across a sentence of Meister Eckhart a German metaphysician and mystic of the medieval times.

"If the only words that you utter in your prayer everyday are 'Thank You' then that will alone suffice."

These words hit me hard. I rued my greed and faithlessness.

Next time when I met him my practice was still less but when he asked me: "How is your practice now?" I told him, "By God's Grace it's very good. Thank You."

Sri Nannagaru nodded slowly and said, "It will improve."

My practice started improving and I understood the beauty of being Thankful to God for everything.

After that whenever I faced anything good or bad in my life...I learned to say Thank You God. Thank You.

I realised life is not about being desirous of better times or hoping for greater materialistic or even spiritual status.

It was about being Thankful to God at all times. ▲



# Spiritual Insights For The Seeker

From The Teachings of  
St John of The Cross

LALITHA KRISHNAN

St. John of the Cross, along with St. Teresa and St. Francis, is known as the grand mystic. He was not only a mystic and least ambitious of saints, but also a philosopher, poet, theologian and spiritual teacher, whose life was his message. He was orderly, systematic and clear in his writings. He had great analytic ability and psychological insight, and followed the psychological method instead of the metaphysical. Though a contemplative he was an active organiser and was connected with the Counter-Reformation. Regarded as an introvertive mystic he emphasised the absence of imagery in mystical consciousness.

Among his well-known works are *The Ascent of Mt. Carmel*, *The Dark Night of the Soul*, *The Spiritual Canticle* and *The Living Flame*

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of Love. Of all these *The Dark Night of the Soul* is the most original work of St. John of the Cross.

“In his works he has touched lightly upon the lower stages of the spiritual journey but the grace and eloquence and power with which he writes of the more ethereal realms have perhaps been exceeded by no other mystic in all literature. Parts of his work are beyond description. They can only be read with the hushed reverence of a receptive soul.”

One needs a certain amount of spiritual insight and maturity to have even an intellectual understanding of St. John of the Cross. In our day and times the followers of the Freudian pleasure principle would find it hard to relate to him and his teachings, as he rejects any kind of pleasure. One expression of the pleasure principle is the excessive importance given to sex. I do not think that most people have the capacity to appreciate that when St. John of the Cross writes of union of love, he is not referring to it in a physical sense but a spiritual one. People also find it difficult to distinguish between being repressed and being renounced by voluntary choice, to give up a lesser form of love for a higher form.

Another point that has to be kept in mind is the fact that the heights that St. John of the Cross is referring to can be attained only by very few. This is true in any religion. Those who want to reach the top must exert their utmost zeal and perseverance, be fearless, endure all hardships, loneliness, rejection, and continue with faith, love and humility in order to find the ‘Most Precious One’. St. John of the Cross illustrates this in the following verses:

To reach satisfaction in all  
Desire its possession in nothing.  
To come to possess all, desire the possession of nothing.  
To arrive at being all, desire to be nothing.  
To come to the knowledge of all, desire the knowledge of nothing.  
To come to the pleasure you have not,  
you must go by a way in which you know not.  
To come to the possession you have not,



S. Gopalakrishnan

Sri Matrubhuteswara Temple

## MOUNTAIN PATH

you must go by a way in which you possess not.  
To come to be what you are not,  
you must go by a way in which you are not.  
When you turn towards something,  
you cease to cast yourself upon the all.  
For to go from all to the all, you must deny yourself of all in all.  
And when you come to the possession of the all,  
you must possess it without wanting anything.  
Because if you desire to have something in all,  
your treasure in God is not purely your all.  
In this nakedness the spirit finds its quietude and rest,  
For in coveting nothing,  
nothing raises it up and nothing weighs it down,  
Because it is in the centre of its humility.  
When it covets something in this very desire it is wearied.

The above verses presented in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel*, one of the most profound poems ever written, gives clear instructions for those who dare to undertake the spiritual journey with the goal of Divine Union. These verses bear reference to the sensory part in the first stage of the journey, and can be interpreted in relationship to the spiritual part in the second stage of the journey.

In order to understand the writings of St. John of the Cross, one has also to have clear ideas of what mysticism and mystics represent. "If anyone thinks that mysticism consists in useless dreaming or in idle and selfish enjoyment of wonderful experiences, without any practical and valuable effect in life, he has his answer. It is the universal testimony of those who know that mystical experience transforms human life and alters character often from the squalid and mean to the noble and selfless."

Mysticism as both attempt and attainment comprises the three stages of purgation, introspection and mystic union or direct intuition of God. It is a singular attitude of mind dedicated to the spiritual quest for union with God. It is the fulfilment of man's highest aspirations as an integrated being, satisfying the eternal values of truth, goodness,

beauty and love. In the mystic the union is conscious, personal, and unique. He or she enjoys, says St. John of the Cross, a certain contact with divinity, and is touched by God, not merely by His manifestation in life. "This is what makes him different from the most outstanding of men, and makes his science, the science of self-evident reality."

The mystic looks upon the face of perfect love, claims no promises and makes no demands. He never rests in the search for God which he holds to be his foremost duty. He seeks without any certainty of success, in a spirit of detachment. "Human knowledge and power are not to comprehend God, nor can our feelings penetrate Him. The soul needs agility in order to mount Him," St. John of the Cross tells us.

The mystic's pilgrimage is one of exile, a getting away from his normal self and normal universe. When the soul drives away all that is contrary to the Divine Will, it becomes transformed in God by love.

In order to overcome our desires, says St. John of the Cross, and to renounce all those things we love and desire we require a more ardent and noble love. In loving God the soul gains the vigour and confidence which enables it easily to abandon all other affections. "The centre of all his instructions and of his thought is unwavering devotion to Christ. Keeping the image of God clearly and simply in the soul is his watchword."

It is necessary not only to love but to be filled with a burning fervour full of anguish. Without this we would not be able to cast aside our senses nor be able to enter into their night, nor have the courage to remain in the darkness of all things and in denial of every desire. It is a deep love that makes a mystic rise to those unnatural acts of self-abnegation, by which he kills his lesser love of the world of senses, and unifies his energies around the new and higher centre of his life. He realises that this union is possible only on a plane where illusion and selfhood have no place. The essence of purification according to Richard of St. Victor is self-simplification.

First comes negative purification, next positive purification or character adjustment. St. Paul's "I live yet not I" is what the mystics

say. There are three factors in this struggle: i) the Changeless Eternal Reality; ii) the web of illusion which confuses and allures the soul; iii) the self always changing, moving, struggling, aware of the real and unreal, and growing conscious of the contrast between them.

The mystical experience begins with the process of purification by which the finite slowly approaches the nature of its Infinite Source. Movement is from the unreal to the Real, as one rids oneself of self-love and all other superficial interests. Everything may change but the goal remains the same. Every single desire has to be surrendered in order for one to be united with God. St. John of the Cross illustrates this point in the following lines: "It makes little difference whether, a bird be held by a slender thread or by a rope, the bird is bound and cannot fly until the cord is broken." When the bird has broken the string and without any thought, fearlessly soars high into the sky, come what may, only then will it be united with God.

According to St. John of the Cross all voluntary desires, great or small, are in the way of union because communion is the transformation of the will of man into the will of God. The smallest desire is division or separation.

Only he who lives consciously in self-awareness deserves to be called a human being. Without being truly human first, one cannot become a superman. Man's task is to satisfy his want by awakening to his true nature. The superman's task is to become united in God, which implies losing oneself in love of God.

St. John of the Cross in *The Ascent of Mount Carmel* compares the spiritual journey to that of climbing a mountain. One has to reach the top to be united with God. In order to reach this union the first step one takes is to actively purify oneself by prayer, meditation and good works. This purification refers to the senses, the lower portal of man. During the period of active purification one has to reject pleasures of a sensual nature and concentrate on the purification of internal and external senses, of the passions, of the intellect and will. This has to be done with prudence and under qualified spiritual direction. This kind of purification is applicable to all spiritual seekers, but the

intensity and height to be reached depends on the goal, the amount of effort and capacity or stage of the individuals. In his writings St. John of the Cross is referring to those who want to become perfect Christians, not just good Christians. To become a perfect Christian, or even a good Christian for that matter, faith, hope and charity are considered to be the three most important virtues.

When the lower part of man is integrated and subdued to the spirit, then the higher part of man will be subdued to God. During the period of passive purification God takes over and leads the soul through silent contemplation. The four passions of love, hope, sorrow and fear have to collaborate with the intellect and will, deny the external senses and imagination in order to unite with God. Throughout the period of purification the two most important virtues are faith and humility. Faith is the foundation of spiritual life as one has to accept things without understanding them. Faith transcends the intellect. Without faith, hope and charity cannot be developed. Faith gives security and sustenance.

St. John of the Cross advises us not to pay attention to visions, locutions and ecstasies as they only detract us from the goal. There is the danger of feeling satisfied, thus preventing further progress, and also of failing in humility. According to the saint, even a true vision does not have as much value as the smallest act of humility. He also warns us against too much austerity.

The union of St. John of the Cross is a Divine Union. His experience is convincing and inspiring, logically, emotionally and ethically. It is known by its fruits which we find in his life and in the influence he had on individuals and social life. He is among elite company — St. Bernard of Clairvaux, John Ruysbroeck and St. Teresa of Avila to name only three, who developed the idea of spiritual marriage in the Western world.

In *The Dark Night of the Soul* he writes about the mystical experience in which the dark night is followed by the rapture of union with God. In the night the soul goes alone in the wilderness leaving all comforts of sense life and of imagination for the sake

of self-purification. He insists that the soul must be emptied of all images, forms and figures with respect to these internal senses if it is to attain Divine Union. The mind is to be emptied of all physical and sensual sensations. The memory, will and understanding are all passive. The inward wisdom leads it through the darkness, however, to the place where the Loving One abides for its coming, and the union or spiritual marriage takes place.

In *The Spiritual Canticle* St. John of the Cross writes about this relationship between soul and Christ its Bridegroom. The verses express the utterances of love arising from mystical understanding. A point to remember here is that “Whether it is called divine union, spiritual marriage or the state of transformation, the reality is the same; a union with God through the likeness of love, a state beyond which a person cannot pass in this life.”

St. John explains in detail about this union in *The Living Flame of Love*, and also refers to the soul’s purgation and suffering brought about by the Flame. The emptying of self seems to be the universal pattern of all introvertive mystical experience. The phrase ‘Dark night of the soul’ was made famous by St. John of the Cross, and is peculiar to Christian mysticism. The spirit feels a total void as though it is in a barren desert. There are different stages in the experience of the dark night. The first is the dark night of the senses in which the images in the mind fade away. This is followed by the dark night of the spirit or faith until it is touched by Divine Grace. In the third night the soul sinks into inactivity, God unites with the soul and sweetens it. He is the inner-most being of the soul and is a living flame of love. The soul feels the touch of God and burns in the fire of love. It is lost to everything else but to love. There is a transition from the dark night of senses to that of spirit.

An instance of this love is more valuable than anything previously experienced, as in this union of the third night His beauty is the soul beauty and the soul’s beauty is His.

St. John makes it clear again and again that the spirit can only be known through love, and not through mere knowledge, as no amount



of knowledge can make us feel love. The joy of final union is felt by St. John when he describes, “The beloved as the silent music and the sound of solitude,” and speaks of the lover (*amadeo*) transformed into the Beloved (*Amado*).

Each one of us is a centre of life and however close we are to other human beings, our inner life has to be lived alone, and, similarly, we have to die alone. None can do it for us. The spiritual quest is a great adventure, a great discovery. If we can realise the essence of our life, we would then know ourselves and know God. Until we reach the top of the mountain in our spiritual journey we cannot fully realize the beauty that lies beyond. However, glimpses of light illumine the path and give us faith to continue the climb. The greatest prayers have been for light and love.

Hence St. John like Jesus says, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and all things shall be added unto you.” Thus only when one sees by the inner light and love, like the mystics, can one say with Isaiah, “The sun shall be no more the light by day, neither for brightness shall the moon give light unto thee, but the Lord shall be unto thee an everlasting light and thy God thy glory.”

The spiritual vision cannot be analysed; it is the joy of truth revealed to a living soul. “To be no more, this is all. This is the supreme joy,” said Jorge Guiltén, the Spanish poet. Here it is important to make a distinction between spiritual joy and pleasure. The *Katha Upanishad*, in the Hindu tradition, speaks of two paths. “There is the path of joy and the path of pleasure, both to attract the soul. The man who is wise chooses the path of joy; the fool chooses the path of pleasure.” Similarly St. John of the Cross points out that if we want this sublime spiritual joy or union with God, we have to choose the path of joy.

For St. John of the Cross, God is love and the end of love. This love cannot be fully expressed in words because it is beyond words. Yet mystics have tried to express some of their deep feelings for God. We see such feelings in the prayer of Sri Chaitanya, an Indian mystic and saint of the sixteenth century: “I pray not for wealth, honour,

pleasure or any earthly joy. I only pray that all my life I may have love, pure love for Thee.”

St. John of the Cross and other mystics who have found light and love give us help for our spiritual journey by sharing with us their spiritual experiences. In one of his spiritual letters he writes, “Never fail whatever may befall you, be it good or evil, to keep your heart quiet and calm in the tenderness of love.” Love then is the first condition for entering the path. How can the water of love be given to one who is not thirsty? is the next question.

This love cannot be attained all at once. One has to cultivate it gradually, and have patience and humility. Suffering is often a blessing if it helps one to grow spiritually. It is in the inner struggle that wisdom, philosophy and psychology can help. When the powers of self-control, intelligence, mental energy, goodwill and love are at man's service, progress will be quick. In this spiritual quest, one starts with prayer and meditation and gradually moves toward contemplation. Here a distinction between meditation and contemplation will make things clearer for the seeker.

Meditation is a movement of thought limited within a circle, but in contemplation there is silence of thought. St. Peter of Alcantara explains the difference between the two as follows: “In meditation we consider carefully divine things and we pass from one to another so that the heart may feel love. It is as though we should strike a flint to draw a spark of fire. But in contemplation the spark is struck, the love we were seeking is here. The soul enjoys silence and peace, not by many reasonings but by simply contemplating the truth. Meditation is the means; contemplation is the end.”

From all that has been said it is clear that there can be no compromise in the life of the spirit. The union that St. John of the Cross experienced is only for those few who long to fly like a bird and be free. The highest religion of man is the search for freedom through unselfish love of God. If one has this love, one attains to truly divine wisdom and union. Fruitless is knowledge and religion which is not love. Vain indeed is the struggle for spiritual life if there is no love in the heart.

The message of St. John of the Cross is a message of spiritual union and joy. He found a treasure and wanted others to find it also. He realised that man is in darkness until he is able to find the path that leads to love, light and union with God. He wanted man to rise above worldly desires and needs, and to lead a life where he could love instead of hate, help instead of hurt.

The spiritual journey is not an easy one to undertake, however it is the only one in life that endures. All else is transient and fleeting. When we keep company with the saints, we are guided and encouraged along the way. In the words of St. Gregory of Nyssa we have an example of such encouragement.

“We can conceive of no limitation in an infinite nature and that which is limitless cannot by its nature be understood. And so every desire for the Beautiful which draws us on in this ascent is intensified by the soul’s very progress toward it. And this is the real meaning of seeking God: never to have this desire satisfied. But fixing our eyes on those things which help us to see we must keep ever alive in us the desire to see more and more. And so no limit can be set to our progress toward God: first of all, because no limit can be put upon the beautiful, and secondly because the increase in our desire for the beautiful cannot be stopped by any sense of satisfaction.”

St. John of the Cross is universal because he appeals to something deep within man. He achieved harmony of vision and wisdom by placing spiritual truths in the crucial test of experience, and only experience can convince man. Man sees the spirit by the light of his own inner spirit that is God. The radiance of eternal beauty shines over the universe. In moments of contemplation we can see the Eternal, and this is the most important message of St. John. The following maxims hold special significance regarding this matter:

The soul that desires God to surrender Himself to it wholly must surrender itself wholly to God and leave nothing for itself. Live in the world as though there were in it but God and thy soul, so that thy heart may be detained by naught that is human. The soul that walks in love wearies not neither is wearied.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

The teachings and maxims of St. John of the Cross represent an attitude of single-mindedness and detachment which according to him are most essential for the deeper, inward journey of the soul.

A seeker of truth will seek truth of being and of love, since a single flash of truth gives us faith far stronger than life. This faith is confirmed by the words of sacred scriptures, by lives of saints and by the inner whisperings within our soul. ▲

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# The Man on the Golden Horse

DOUGLAS HALEBI

Many years ago a horseman went clattering over the streets of Damascus, past the ancient settlements of Akkad and Mohajirna, beyond the beautiful old houses of Salahiyya. Then he ascended a slope of Mount Kasiyun that loomed over the city below. He paused, as man has done since time immemorial, to feast his eyes on the great cosmopolitan city spread out before him, an ancient habitat said to be “as old as stars, rivers and trees. As old as the Earth itself.” The rider appeared to be out of time, out of place in the whole modern era, surrounded by automobiles, vendors, young couples in love, food trucks and boys hawking watermelon seeds and roasted nuts. From his own teachers he had learned that there were human settlements here 12,000 years ago. He lacked a formal, intimate knowledge of the ancient past, the stream of Sumerians, Akkadians, Assyrians, Canaanites, Phoenicians, Greeks and Romans that came, wave after wave. But he could point to the hill where Cain is said to

Douglas Halebi was born and educated in the United States, with paternal relatives of Gypsy origin in the Near East and maternal relatives of Anglo-American descent in North America.

have slain his brother, Abel. And he remembered well the vestiges of a Byzantine Christian Empire, the coming of Islam and the poem in stone called the Umayyad Mosque.

As a boy he had heard marvellous tales about Saladin, Rashid ad din Sinan, Richard Coeur de Lion, the Knights Templar and the Crusader armies, the coming of the Egyptian Mamlukes and the Ottoman Turks. He knew still better, as if he had seen and befriended them himself, the visitors from afar who came to Damascus, such as T.E. Lawrence, David Rockefeller, Freya Stark, Agatha Christie, Theodore Roosevelt, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, George Santayana, Charles Lindberg and Prince Aly Khan. All of these people, he said, were his 'contemporaries' or 'coevals', men and women who "strayed into this world and then out of it" before his very eyes, leaving behind rich reputations and passionate defenders.

As well as many detractors. The old horseman sprang from a family of Gypsy origin and retained a vast repertoire of ancestral lore in a purely narrative form. As if poetry and song had been created only for him, and only now, so that he could sate his thirst for self-expression and his deep desire for purer, richer, more perfect understanding. His horse was a shimmering palomino steed that looked as if pure gold had been poured over it, giving it a lustrous shine, a near blinding radiance, like the sun at the top of the sky. He was called 'Noah' because his head was said to be an ark, or as some people called it a hive, full of the precious honeycomb of unwritten knowledge.

I was later to see him with another golden horse in the *hashi nura* or Gypsy Camp, on the edge of Beirut. That man was Uncle Noah and he instilled in us the following impressions of life and destiny:

He said that instead of consuming centuries and ages of history, measuring ourselves against the infinite and the absolute, we should learn to pause, lingering over the hour and the day, soaking up all its sorrows and joys, its abundance and its poverty, stupefied and gratified by the endless vastness set before our eyes, the ever renewed hopes and dreams that can cause man to flower and renew himself again and again. Every rain-drop that glistened in the meadow was unique; and so too were the succession of moments that comprise the substance of a life.

We were meant to live well in the moment, with deep passion and an endless yearning, for no other has been promised to us. Let us, he said, try to understand the thawing river and the spring grass and the red soil of Avshar Plain as gifts we have been given, to see what we may make of this life. And if we are capable of seeing within it a higher, finer, more sublime Reality. “Let us learn,” he implored us, “to see the Earth as a material surface permeated in spiritual wine and man himself as a being of transcendent origins, destined to go in quest of transcendent goals.”

The oldest of the master bards in Uncle’s company was Nuratin, who always maintained that there is poetry in the medlar tree, songs of sorrow in hailstones and lightning, epic tales and romances ‘hanging down’ from the sun and the moon and the circumpolar stars, “waiting for man to coax it all into flower.” Everything is connected, interrelated in a cosmic procession that beckons to us, like the water of a well in the desert beckons to a thirsty traveller. And all of this need not preclude respect and admiration for the beauty of high knowledge, the love of an ever accumulating wisdom.

We cannot ripen into fullness with a single gesture or a worthy intention; but neither can we seal ourselves off from the infinitely varied, ever instructive world around us. And the world has lessons to teach us yesterday, today and tomorrow.

“Love mankind,” Uncle advised us, “honour your ancestors, rejoice in your children, savour the beauty of life, and be grateful for its gifts. And learn to value the sorrows of this world, for they are also a source of discovery and self-enrichment. Respect, honour every man who has a rich heart, and shun the company of anyone who is without a heart. No one is of less value than a man without a heart. And consider the whole world your home, accept all its intricate variation, drink from all its wells of knowledge. And if you can, travel to the ends of the earth. But also remember that wherever you find yourself, that is where you were meant to be.”

History, he added, is not limited by the ignorance and prejudice that would demean the other nations and enshrine one ‘grand idea’ as the wellspring of every worthy quest and every flowering of man.

Civilizations were distinct and unique but they also overlapped, provoked, stimulated, and challenged one another. History, he maintained, does not follow one immutable path, become petrified in one mould, comprise one linear trajectory. History was like the tale of ‘a thousand rising suns’, none of which fails to ‘become a setting sun’ sooner or later. He added that we ourselves were living in a land that had ‘slumbered for centuries’ but insisted that it was awake and ever advancing. And man, he assured us, “can flower in endless ways that our illustrious leaders neither know nor care about.”

He concluded that the failure of a nation, a people, a culture was an impoverishment of all mankind, since every people, when it ripens well and attains its own unique destiny, enhances the common heritage of the human race. The whole human heritage belonged to each and to all; and whenever we diminish any world of man, we are diminishing ourselves, our heritage as human beings, “uprooting the ancient trees and cutting the roses before they begin to blossom.” Every *nasiya*, nation or tribe, was meant to “follow its appointed path,” attain its own destiny, unlike any other in some respects, and pursue its mission in history, embark on its own quest for “water of life and bread of life.” And none could be replaced by another, “not even the lowly Gypsies.”

“Understand,” he advised us, “that whenever a people ripens and cultivates all its gifts, the world is enriched and increased in an incomparable manner. Because every people contains the seeds of countless new institutions, perceptions, discoveries, abilities, inclinations, aspirations and goals. But if it deviates from its own path, so that it becomes like a branch cut from a high-flowering tree, then it thirsts for the living sap and fruit of the tree, but no longer draws strength from its roots. What is concealed does not become manifest; what is latent does not come into flower and adorn the world with its beauty.”

“So journey far,” he told us, “but maintain the poetry and the passion your fathers bequeathed to you. It is an everlasting nourishment for all the generations.” ▲



# Spiritual Experiences and Collections of Concepts

## Part Two

JAMES CHARLTON

As I climb Arunachala on a mist-free dawn, the rising sun evokes colour from the eastern slopes. At the summit, my response is a single *Om Namah Shivaya*. I feel no urge to prostrate. Those Advaitins who forsake ritualism reassure me by saying: Who would be bowing to whom? Who prostrate to whom?

The mountain speaks of essential unity. The mystery that is 'without us', draws from 'within us' our hidden depths. We look to the sages and saints who personify the Self. The Vedas declare that the Self alone exists substantively, in Itself and in all.

A common metaphor for our openness to the Self, or, if you will, Ultimate truth, is that of a light bulb. The light will not shine unless two terminals are engaged. Unaided, we are incapable of linking the

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terminals. But Sri Ramana, and countless other sages and saints, assure us that grace is always to hand.

In various traditions, openness and subsequent transformation is described as a transition from one 'level of mind' to another 'level of mind'. If transformation is taken to mean 'utterly shifted to the vertical dimension', then the present author has not been transformed! But two months of living close to Ramanasramam appears in retrospect to have been a process of mental shifting. I experienced 'a theology of silence' within me and around me. This contrasts markedly with the conceptual overload to be found in the Evangelical churches of my upbringing.

I now listen more deeply, and I find the inadequacy of all words. I accept the Peace that is offered. The words might then fall away as Silence begins to suffuse the body. I also accept that there's no absolute cure, in this present life, for an anxious personality. Generations of anxious people appear in my family's history. Research has shown that in many families there's a genetic predisposition towards anxiety. Biology plays its part, traumatic events in childhood and youth sometimes furthering a biological inheritance.

Conservative churches, such as the one in which I was raised, usually have little understanding of psychological issues. Problems are commonly designated as 'a lack of faith.' The West still has large numbers of churches which have little time for psychological and psychiatric medicine. These are often 'do-it yourself' churches (opposed to an ordained priesthood) and enthusiastic about strategies to persuade people to become Christians. Scarcely anyone in such churches would have heard of the *Bhagavad Gita* or its difficult teaching: 'Act without seeking the fruits of your actions.'

Anxiety, stress and trauma cannot be regarded as 'mental' problems which require the sufferer to 'pull himself together' spiritually and 'transcend' the difficulty. We inhabit bodies, and symptoms are located in the body as responses of the bodily organism. What the body is manifesting needs to be listened to, interpreted and responded to. The aim is to feel and think concurrently.

When anxiety impacts my body/mind there is ‘awareness of breathing’ to be done. But first the anxiety needs to be looked at, explored a little, before it can be gradually released. ‘Ah yes, there’s anxiety again! Hello anxiety!’ Or: ‘I’m not an anxious person. I’m a person who has anxiety at this moment!’

Then, adapting the words of Sri Anandamayi Ma and Sri Ramana, I take a normal breath, through the nose, and hold the breath for a count of five. Then I breathe out gently, through the nose, saying to myself ‘*Om Nama Shivaya*’. Next, it’s slow, normal breathing, in and out for about ten breaths, with a count of three on the in-breath and a slower count of three on the out-breath. It’s time then to recommence the cycle, with a normal breath being held for a count of five. And so on.

Our bodies are gifts; they are temples we briefly inhabit. For most of us, it’s a pious fantasy to choose a ‘spiritual’ life instead of a ‘bodily’ life. All aspects of our personhood require integration. There are strands of misguided teaching in Christianity, and in Eastern religions, which dishonour the body. It is as if the body has nothing to do with spirituality.

A man from the U.S.A. decides to climb Arunachala in bare feet, although in everyday life he wears shoes. When his feet are lacerated, he realizes that he’s trying too hard to be ‘spiritual’ at needless expense to the body. At the level of conventional truth, his spiritual growth depends upon respect for his body. We are not abstract beings, whose feelings and senses are somehow ‘second rate’. Whatever else might emerge as our ‘calling’, it’s basic to fully inhabit the form that we’ve been given.

Today I feel connected to Ramanasramam and its traditions, although I understand few of the liturgies and bhajans. People there didn’t need to preach. They attracted others to the Light, to the degree in which they had (re-)integrated themselves, by grace, within the Light.

But in the cafes near the ashram I would sometimes meet Westerners who got under my skin with declarations of their own personal divinity. Raised perhaps as nominal Christians, their

experience of India seemed to have crystallized into a supposed 'truth'. They said things such as: 'Oh I don't particularly need a spiritual teacher. I realise that I myself am God!' My best response is to go further in my sadhana and find the zone of loving acceptance. It's not for me to change people, but to change the way in which I view people. The *Gita* reminds me that the true yoga is a contest with oneself to develop skill-in-action. The Divine remains the subject, the One subject. But there's a sense in which I can regard the Divine as the object. By this I mean that my awareness can expand to regard 'an irritating person' as part of the Divine.

Unsolicited announcements of one's personal divinity are curious. On the one hand they're absurd. On the other hand, they contain what even Christian mystics call 'a spark of truth'. But such declarations generally reveal an ignorance of the doctrine of the two truths. From the point of view of ultimate or absolute truth we are participants in the Divine. This is asserted by much of Christianity. From the perspective of Advaita Vedanta, we know that all is *Brahman*, yet that assertion, again, comes from an ultimate point of view.

But from the point of view of conventional or relative truth, we humans are floundering. We flay about in search of the Light. Hence Divine grace. Hence the Buddha, hence the Christ, hence the great modern souls such as Sri Ramakrishna, Sri Anandamayi Ma and Sri Ramana. Such people reached a stage of integration which ran deeper than any dualisms. Within their own being, they fused ultimate truth and conventional truth.

There is a sense in which humanity can be called 'divine', provided this is understood as a derived divinity. This means that the Divine and the human are indivisible but distinct. There remains a metaphysical duality within our contingent world, just as death and life form an inescapable duality, and just as darkness and light do also. The *Gita* alludes to 'the pairs of opposites'. In the longer perspective, these pairs are resolved. They find their fulfilment in absolute or ultimate truth. Meanwhile we all inhabit a contingent, impermanent world. Great souls teach us that the disciplines of

jnana, bhakti and karma are necessary, according to temperament and disposition.

At the level of conventional truth is the *ahamkara* or the 'I-maker'. The *ahamkara* naturally functions through the senses and the reason. It's not to be despised. But we have the intuition that life's main task is to go deeper than the *ahamkara* and to enter (or re-enter) union and communion with the Divine. We are made one, by the one who is One. Or rather, we recover our original oneness. Our deeper self emerges through recognition of the transcendental Self. Illusion is seen for what it is. That which is real comes into clearer focus.

Perhaps we've all experienced glimpses of the Ineffable, or the Absolute, or the Nameless, or *Brahman*, or God (or whatever word fits with our tradition). But Sri Ramana asks us not to be fascinated by experiences which are 'out of the ordinary'. He states that everyday life is the best arena for our balanced development.

At the present time I find that remembering the Self is too abstract to hold my attention for long. To say the words 'I Am' is easier. From childhood I've been conditioned to regard Jesus as the 'I Am' sent from the One who is the 'original' I AM. Sometimes I shift from the thought 'I Am' to the feeling of 'I Am'. Am I beginning to meditate on Consciousness itself? Consciousness with a capital 'C' has been designated by some traditions as holding equivalence to the One Without A Second. This is not the case with Christianity, which follows Western philosophy in confining the notion of consciousness to the mental activity of the individual ego, the little 'I'.

If I observe my anxious thoughts and their bodily symptoms (such as body-drenching sweat) without judging myself negatively, the thoughts diminish. Anxiety can teach me something. Since my idiom is historically more Christian than Hindu, I experience the words of the Apostle Paul as reassuring:

"We all reflect as in a mirror the splendour of the Lord; thus we are transformed into his likeness, from splendour to splendour; such is the influence of the Lord who is Spirit." (2 Corinthians 3:18, New English Bible version)

The nature of the Divine is self-giving. The nature of anxiety, even if it's part of a person's biological and psychological inheritance, tends to be one of self-enclosure. This is humanly explicable and humanly treatable, up to a point. Sri Ramana's emphasis on grace has a parallel in teachings attributed to Jesus. The idolisation of 'will-power' elevates the ego.

Even in aspects of Buddhism, much of which is not at all compatible with Hinduism or Christianity, there is an emphasis on grace. Shin Buddhism, the Japanese 'Pure Land' expression of the Mahayana, teaches that we need the influence of Another. In other words, grace. The Japanese word is *tariki*, meaning 'outside help'. This would fit with words attributed to Jesus: "I am the vine, and you the branches. He who dwells in me, as I dwell in him, bears much fruit; for apart from me you can do nothing." (John 15:5, New English Bible version)

For Shin Buddhists, the 'Other power' is the joy-giving presence of Amida Buddha. In Christian language, the parallel experience is usually described as the presence of the Holy Spirit, which communicates the Christ to hearts and minds. Both Amida Buddha and the Holy Spirit are credited with uniting humanity into a community of mutual care. The Apostle Paul states that the Spirit is one, but its manifestations are pluriform. No-one can tell the direction from which the Spirit may come, or where it may go. It is described as the same Spirit through which Jesus experienced his Advaita with 'the Father'.

At Ramanasramam I experience the holy community of mutual care under the names Arunachala Shiva, Shiva Nataraja and of course Sri Ramana. Am I chasing spiritual experiences, by living in association with the ashram? Or am I a collector of more knowledge? Readers of this essay might nod to themselves at this point: 'Ah, another false dualism!' ▲

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## HOW I CAME TO BHAGAVAN

# The Alchemy of Sri Bhagavan

PINGALI SURYA SUNDARAM

The year was 1984. Two very significant events of my life occurred that year. The first was some time in the month of February and the second in November. In February, I was at Madras (where I had spent a little over two decades by then) and used to regularly attend the weekend talks of Sri J.Krishnamurti, who usually visited Madras during the winter months. One evening (when there was no talk), Krishnaji was about to go by car to the nearby beach. The car was waiting for him in the portico; at a distance of about fifteen yards, some twenty or twenty five of us stood in a semicircle to have the darshan of the seer. Krishnaji came down the steps and was about to step into the car but somehow he looked in our general direction and instead of getting into the car, walked towards us. He stopped just in front of me. I reverentially joined my palms in a *namaskaram* while

Pingali Surya Sundaram is a devotee who lives in Hyderabad. He has rendered a great service to Telugu devotees for his many translations of books about Bhagavan into their language.

my eyes closed involuntarily. He clasped my hands at which I opened my eyes. He said very gently, "Don't have so much respect for me, Sir. I am a nobody." Saying that, he let go his clasp and after casting a deep, penetrating look at me, walked back to the car. Needless to say, all of us assembled there were astonished at his modesty and courtesy.

By November 1984, I moved to Calcutta on transfer. A day or two after my occupying the residential flat allotted to me by the Government, I called on my neighbour, a Tamilian, and introduced myself to him. In their drawing room on the centre table I happened to notice a copy of *The Mountain Path* and very casually turned over the cover page. For the first time I saw a picture of Sri Ramana Maharshi and was stunned by it. I said to myself that it would be wonderful to possess that picture. But I did not feel free to ask for it nor did I say anything about it to my acquaintance and returned to my flat. To my utter surprise on the following day that gentleman cut out the picture from the magazine and gave it to me. I was overjoyed and thanked him profusely. In due course, I got it framed. At that time I knew nothing of Sri Bhagavan as during my stay at Madras I was more into the teachings of JK. From that day onwards I have been offering flowers to that picture of Sri Bhagavan.

So it may not be inappropriate if I were to dare claim that Sri Bhagavan beckoned me on his own.

In 1987 I moved to Hyderabad, retired from service on superannuation and settled down there.

It was early in 1988 that I attended a *satsang* for the first time at Ramana Kendram and became acquainted with Prof. K. Subrahmanian, an ardent devotee of Sri Bhagavan who had the privilege of being with and interacting with Sri Bhagavan. Prof. Subrahmanian became a good friend of mine.

I keep asking myself what exactly the influence of Sri Bhagavan has been on me and marvel at his alchemy.

Owing to wrong priorities during my working life I did not set myself any lofty goals. All that I was interested in was carving out a good career for myself and strove to achieve it. But my ambition was thwarted and my attempts were futile. Instead of accepting the



situation I became almost perpetually melancholic and this showed in my relationships. It was this sorrowful disposition that Sri Bhagavan eradicated from me. Jagadeeswara Sastriar says, “Sri Bhagavan bestows peace on those who worship him.” Likewise, Ganapati Muni addresses Sri Bhagavan as the ‘destroyer of sorrow’. I can vouch for the authenticity of these assertions.

With the removal of sorrow a certain calmness and peace slowly descended on me. This did not happen overnight. It was a gradual imperceptible but sure. It was real but ineffable. When I realised that I am no great sadhaka I cannot fail to recognise my extraordinary good fortune at Sri Bhagavan’s response to my feeble prayers. I did face some difficult situations now too but I no longer worry about them.

Post-retirement life and old age are dreaded by most people. But by Sri Bhagavan’s grace this has been the most rewarding phase of my life.

Health-wise, of course, it has been a disaster. I had a stroke of temporary paralysis and three heart attacks, the last of which occurred in March 2014. My recovery from the last, according to the doctors, was nothing short of a miracle for a man of my age (I will turn 84 shortly). The miracle undoubtedly was wrought by Sri Bhagavan.

This distressing medical history did not, surprisingly, affect me mentally. It is physical infirmity that haunts most elderly people and renders them depressed. By Sri Bhagavan’s grace no such thing happened in my case.

One of my earlier afflictions was a loss of self-esteem caused by my failure to make a mark in my career. I realise now that it was entirely stupid of me to have set myself a rather difficult target. My competence, apparently, did not match my ambition. But I did not recognize this then.

Sri Bhagavan in a very miraculous way turned me into a prolific writer of Telugu books about him and his teachings. These were published during the period 1994-2014. Most of them are translations which have been generously patronised by Telugu-reading devotees. Of the ten books I was privileged to write, I will make a mention of three, all biographies of Sri Bhagavan. The first of these is a translation

of *Self-Realisation* by B.V. Narasimha Swamy into Telugu with the title *Athma Sakshatkaramu*. This book fetched me an award from the Sahitya Academy (National Academy of Letters) in 2002. The second is *Sri Ramana Leela* in Telugu by Krishna Bhikshu which I translated into English under the same title. Both the translations are Sri Ramansramam's publications. The third book is an original biography in Telugu, with the title *Ramaneeyam*, written and published by me in 2012. This book incorporates information about Sri Bhagavan not found in any other Telugu biography on Sri Bhagavan; and hence it has become very popular. These three and other works have given me immense satisfaction and restored my self-esteem in the sense that my life, after all, has not been entirely useless.

There are numerous sayings of Sri Bhagavan which set me thinking and helped me change my attitude towards life. I will mention two of them.

The first is what young Venkataraman told his mother, who came in 1898 to beg him to return home: “The Ordainer controls the fate of all souls in accordance with their past deeds — their *prarabdhakarma*...” For all practical purposes this may be taken as the first *upadesa* of the future Satguru; one which has eternal validity. Is it not true that all the conflict and suffering in life is due to our inability to accept facts as they are and our propensity to resist them? Pondering over this and trying to implement this upadesa gives great peace.

Again in *Akshara Mana Malai*, verse 75, Sri Bhagavan says, “Unattached to the physical frame composed of the [five] elements, let me forever repose happy in the sight of Thy splendour, Oh Arunachala!” (translated by K.Swaminathan). I think this particular verse has a larger connotation than attachment to the physical body only. It extends to our attachment to progeny, possessions and other matters which stem directly from our physical existence. It is this attachment that acts as a veil and prevents us from beholding the Almighty. Hence the key to peaceful existence lies in cultivating detachment. This is easier said than done. But there is no escape from this in the long run.

In conclusion I must confess that I am no great sadhaka, I am just an ordinary devotee who is a recipient of Sri Bhagavan's abundant Grace. The purpose of this article is to show how the grace has operated on me so far. I can only pray, "Do as Thou will then, my beloved, but grant me only ever increasing love for Thy feet,"<sup>1</sup> and await His pleasure. ▲

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<sup>1</sup> *Necklet of Nine Gems*, v.7.

## Roots

Suchitra

When I complain of pain like a thorn in my heart,  
That will not let me sit stand breathe  
eat sleep laugh or cry or do anything worthwhile,  
they ask me to dig deep and find the roots of this pain,  
of this debilitating ineptitude.  
This pain of this world, they say,  
childhood traumas adolescent blues coming of age fears.  
I burrow deep into my own darkness  
like an industrious mole,  
like Vishnu who was determined to find  
the base of Arunachala.  
Vishnu dug for thousands of years to no avail.  
With the shovel of each thought  
I throw out one fistful of darkness after another  
and to my surprise,  
I find the treasure chest of you, Bhagavan.  
All I want is to embrace it,  
— Not to take a sliver as if it were my own.  
Please do not ask me to hurry up move on like they do  
when one stands before Venkataraman at Tirupati  
with folded hands  
and a melting heart.



Deepam Procession at Arunachaleswara Temple Inner Prakara

# René Guénon and Sri Ramana Maharshi

## Two Remarkable Sages in Modern Times

### Part Four

SAMUEL BENDECK SOTILLOS

It was Martin Lings who drew a paramount parallel between Shaykh Ahmad Al-'Alawi (1869-1934) and the Maharshi, two principal spiritual lights in the modern world. "Sri Ramana Maharshi of Tiruvannamalai, whose teaching was essentially the same as his own [Shaykh Ahmad Al-'Alawi]." <sup>64</sup> Readers may be interested to know that in 1932 the same year that Schuon entered Islam, he went to visit Shaykh Ahmad Al-'Alawi in Mostaganem, Algeria and received his initiation (*bay'ah*) into the Sufi path, the inner dimension of

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<sup>64</sup> Martin Lings, 'The Spiritual Master', in *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad Al-'Alawi, His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p.80.

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Islam. Schuon articulated his praise for Shaykh Ahmad Al-'Alawi in the following words: “[S]omeone who represents in himself... the idea which for hundreds of years has been the life-blood of that [the Islamic] civilization. To meet such a one is like coming face to face, in mid-twentieth century, with a mediaeval Saint or a Semitic Patriarch”.<sup>65</sup> It was at Shaykh Ahmad Al-'Alawi's insistence that Shaykh Adda Bentounés (1898-1952), who later became his successor, provided the *ijaza* (certificate) confirming Schuon as a *muqaddam* (assistant to the master in teaching other students) in 1933. Shortly afterward, Guénon wrote a kind letter to Schuon expressing: “My congratulations on your new dignity of muqaddam.”<sup>66</sup> In 1936, at twenty-eight years of age, Schuon was invested with the function of a spiritual guide. He is the founder of the Maryamiyyah Tariqah and is known by his traditional name as Shaykh Isa Nur ad-Din Ahmad.<sup>67</sup>

The parallel drawn between Sri Ramana Maharshi and Shaykh Ahmad Al-'Alawi is also an example of how two analogous spiritual traditions manifest themselves in the temporal cycle, one within Hinduism, a religion that traces itself back to the beginning of the Manvantara or the temporal cycle known as the Krita-Yuga or Satya-Yuga (Golden Age) and the other Islam, which represents the closing of the current temporal cycle known as the Kali-Yuga (Iron Age). There is an inverse relationship between the two revelations of — Hinduism and Islam — where they overlap and touch one another in their innermost core. The spiritual possibilities that were once present in the commencement of the temporal cycle become possible once again in its closure. Dara Shikoh (1615-1659), the son of the

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<sup>65</sup> Frithjof Schuon, quoted in Martin Lings, ‘The Spiritual Master’, in *A Sufi Saint of the Twentieth Century: Shaikh Ahmad Al-'Alawi, His Spiritual Heritage and Legacy* (Cambridge, UK: Islamic Texts Society, 1993), p.116.

<sup>66</sup> Jean-Baptiste Aymard, ‘A Biographical Approach’, in *Frithjof Schuon: Life and Teachings* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2004), p. 22.

<sup>67</sup> See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ‘Frithjof Schuon and the Islamic Tradition’, *Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 1 (Summer 1999), pp. 27-48; See also Michael Oren Fitzgerald, *Frithjof Schuon: Messenger of the Perennial Philosophy* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2010).

Mughal emperor Shah Jahan (1592-1666), spoke to this underlying metaphysic between the Hindu dharma and Islamic spirituality, “The science of Sufism and the science of Vedanta are one.”<sup>68</sup> The Prophet Muhammad is the final messenger, known as the ‘Seal of the Prophets,’ within the Islamic revelation which rejoins with the initial revelation of Hinduism in its conclusion. This integral framework allows one to view the entire temporal cycle in its metaphysical transparency, representing both the immutable quintessence and the final synthesis of all revelations in the Divine Unity.

For this reason both Guénon and Schuon articulated the central importance of Hinduism or the *sanatana dharma* (the primordial, eternal code of conduct) and its analogues expression with the inner dimension of Islam: “At heart we are like Hindus—Hindus in the Sufi form.”<sup>69</sup> The following are some confirmations of this: “*Sanatana Dharma*...derives most directly from the primordial tradition;”<sup>70</sup> “the perspective of Shankara is one of the most adequate expressions possible of the philosophia perennis or sapiential esoterism;”<sup>71</sup> “The most direct doctrinal expression of the sophia perennis is undoubtedly Advaita Vedanta;”<sup>72</sup> “[T]he Vedanta stands out as one of the most direct formulations possible of what constitutes the very essence of our spiritual reality;”<sup>73</sup> “[T]he Advaita Vedanta...is the most direct possible expression of gnosis.”<sup>74</sup>

<sup>68</sup> Shah Jahan, quoted in Cyril Glassé, *The New Encyclopedia of Islam*, Revised Edition (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2002), p.112.

<sup>69</sup> Frithjof Schuon, quoted in Swami Ramdas, ‘Hindus at Heart’, in *World is God* (Kanhangad, Kerala: Anandashram, 1955), p. 105.

<sup>70</sup> René Guénon, ‘Sanatana Dharma’, in *Studies in Hinduism* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), p. 83.

<sup>71</sup> Frithjof Schuon, ‘Understanding Esoterism’, in *Esoterism as Principle and as Way*, trans. William Stoddart (London: Perennial Books, 1990), p. 21.

<sup>72</sup> Frithjof Schuon, ‘The Perennial Philosophy’, in *The Unanimous Tradition: Essays on the Essential Unity of All Religions*, ed. Ranjit Fernando (Colombo: Sri Lanka Institute of Traditional Studies, 1999), p. 22.

<sup>73</sup> Frithjof Schuon, ‘The Vedanta’, in *Language of the Self* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1999), p. 19.

<sup>74</sup> Frithjof Schuon, ‘Gnosis, Language of the Self’, in *Language of the Self* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1999), p. 201.

In a similar fashion, we might reference ‘A Monk of the West’, who used the pseudonym of ‘Elie Lemoine’ (Alphonse Levée, b. 1911), a French Cistercian monk who, at the young age of twenty, found a copy of fellow countryman René Guénon’s *Orient et Occident* (East and West) in a second-hand book stall while he was posted in Asia. This event had a tremendous impact that endured for the rest of his life, and was instrumental in his decision to take up the monastic vocation. It was in the discovery of the René Guénon’s works that ‘Elie Lemoine’ – A Monk of the West – found an integral metaphysical doctrine that was universal in its principles, “As for ourselves, we will say unequivocally that after more than forty years of intellectual reflection on this doctrine [*advaita-vada* or non-dualism], having allowed it to impregnate us more and more profoundly, we have found nothing that has seemed incompatible with our full and complete faith in the Christian Revelation.”<sup>75</sup>

Another testimony of the unanimity between the traditions of the East and West, as Elie Lemoine also references, is found in the life of Benedictine monk, Swami Abhishiktananda (Henri Le Saux, 1910-1973), who was a pioneer in Hindu-Christian dialogue. He arrived in India on 14th August 1948, and remained there until his earthly passing. At the end of January 1949, he had his first darshan with the Sage of Arunachala, whose influence upon his life was pivotal:

“Even before my mind was able to recognize the fact, and still less to express it, the invisible halo of this Sage had been perceived by something in me deeper than any words. Unknown harmonies awoke in my heart.... In the Sage of Arunachala of our time I discerned the unique Sage of the eternal India, the unbroken succession of her sages, her ascetics, her seers; it was as if the very soul of India penetrated to the very depths of my own soul and held mysterious communion with it. It was a call which pierced through everything, rent it in pieces and opened a mighty abyss...”<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> A Monk of the West, ‘Conclusion’, in *Christianity and the Doctrine of Non-Dualism*, trans. Alvin Moore, Jr. and Marie M. Hansen (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), p.136.

<sup>76</sup> Swami Abhishiktananda, *The Secret of Arunachala: A Christian Hermit on Shiva’s Holy Mountain* (Delhi: ISPCK, 1979), p.9.



The reader may therefore ask why Guénon and Schuon elected Islam rather than Hinduism. Due to spatial constraints we cannot explore this matter in great detail,<sup>77</sup> yet one would point out that Hinduism requires the participation in one of the four major social divisions of Hindu society – *Brahmins* (priests), *Kshatriyas* (warriors), *Vaisyas* (merchants) and *Sudras* (peasants, manual labourers) – known as the caste system (*varna dharma*), and is not open to those outside this traditional form. For this reason, in the case of Guénon and Schuon, not being born into the caste system, Hinduism was closed to them. Through integral metaphysics they comprehended that religious pluralism corresponds to human diversity, and that each revelation spoke as it were to a distinct human collectivity as the Koranic declaration upholds, “For each [community] among you We have appointed a Law and a Way.” (5:48) With this said, there are always exceptional cases such as the sannyasins or sadhus who have opted out of the caste system and are so to speak above caste. According to Sri Ramakrishna, “[T]he rules of caste are automatically effaced for the man who has reached perfection and realized the unity of all things.”<sup>78</sup>

The notion of ‘conversion’ also lends itself to much confusion as it is commonly interpreted from the exoteric or religious perspective and does not generally take into consideration the Greek term *metanoia* which designates a change in the immanent Intellect (*Intellectus* or *Nous*), indicating an ‘intellectual metamorphosis’ of a transpersonal nature.<sup>79</sup> In speaking of the Hindu dharma, the notion of conversion does not exist, “Hinduism has more ritual than any other religion, yet its canonical texts do not contain any rite for conversion. No better proof is needed for the fact that we have at no time either

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<sup>77</sup> See Frithjof Schuon, ‘René Guénon: A Note’, in *René Guénon: Some Observations* (Hillsdale, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2004), p. 6.

<sup>78</sup> Sri Ramakrishna, quoted in Frithjof Schuon, ‘The Meaning of Caste’, in *The Language of the Self* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1999), p. 119.

<sup>79</sup> See Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, ‘On Being in One’s Right Mind’, in *What is Civilization? And Other Essays* (Ipswich, UK: Golgonooza Press, 1989), pp. 33-41.

encouraged conversion or practiced it.”<sup>80</sup> For the pure esoterism of the ‘transcendent unity of religions,’ there is no ‘conversion’ from one religion to another.<sup>81</sup> Readers may find it helpful to recall that Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahid Pallavicini (b. 1926), of Milan, Italy, who as a young seeker, was moved by Guénon’s oeuvre, and although he perceived the importance of theory he also perceived its indispensable and corresponding practice of an authentic spiritual form. This led Shaykh Pallavicini to embrace Islam which incidentally took place on 7th January 1951, when he was twenty-five years old, and was given the name ‘Abd al-Wahid, ‘servant of the One’. Shortly after, Shaykh Pallavicini learned that Guénon had passed away in Cairo on the same day. This event served as an omen indicating that he needed to carry on this vital work. Shaykh Pallavicini makes the following observation on the notion of ‘conversion’:

“René Guénon’s so-called conversion from Christianity to Islam should not be misunderstood as a rejection of his original religion. Instead, it should be regarded as an acceptance of Islam through which he joined what he called the Primordial Tradition (din al-qayimah) in its final expression, which incorporates all previous Revelations without opposing them.”<sup>82</sup>

Guénon himself speaks on this matter,

“In principle, there is only one really legitimate conversion, the one that consists in the connection to a tradition, whatever it may be, on the part of someone who was previously lacking any traditional attachment.... Contrary to what takes place in ‘conversion,’ nothing here implies the attribution of the superiority of one traditional form over another.... [A]nyone who has an understanding of the unity

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<sup>80</sup> Jagadguru H.H. Sri Chandrasekharendra Saraswati Swamigal, Sankaracharya of Kanchi, ‘The Unity of Religions’, in *Introduction to Hindu Doctrine: Illustrated*, ed. Michael Oren Fitzgerald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2008), p.8.

<sup>81</sup> See René Guénon, quoted in Alain Daniélou, ‘René Guénon et la tradition hindoue’, in *René Guénon: Les Dossiers H*, ed. Pierre-Marie Sigaud (Lausanne: L’Age d’Homme, 1984), p.138.

<sup>82</sup> Shaykh ‘Abd al-Wahid Pallavicini, ‘A Meeting of Genius and Holiness’, in *A Sufi Master’s Message: In Memoriam René Guénon* (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2010), p.33.

of traditions, whether through a merely theoretical comprehension or through an effective realization, is necessarily for this very reason ‘unconvertible’ to anything whatsoever.”<sup>83</sup>

We must now turn our attention to another matter, which has raised much discussion with regard to the fact that Sri Ramana Maharshi did not have a human guru, in the traditional sense. The Maharshi’s response to this was: “[A] Guru need not always be in human form.”<sup>84</sup> Given his jnamic nature he was able to awaken without the traditional requirement of initiation (*diksha*), which likens him to what is referred to in Islamic esoterism as a fard, a ‘solitary’ or someone who receives Spiritual Realization spontaneously and outside the normal channels of tradition. The Maharshi elaborates on this matter, “That depends on what you call Guru. He need not necessarily be in human form. Dattatreya had twenty-four Gurus—the elements, etc. That means that any form in the world was his Guru. Guru is absolutely necessary. The Upanishads say that none but a Guru can take a man out of the jungle of mental and sense perceptions, so there must be a Guru.”<sup>85</sup> Pallis spoke to this in a letter to the Trappist monk Thomas Merton (1915-1968), who also held a high regard for Ramana Maharshi: “[Ramana Maharshi...] did not at any time become the disciple of a known guru; he is one who ‘perfected his sadhana [spiritual practice] in a previous life.’”<sup>86</sup> Incidentally, Merton referred to the Sage of Arunachala as “one of the former great Indian saints of our time, Ramana Maharshi”.<sup>87</sup> Merton likewise had a high regard for Shaykh Ahmad Al-‘Alawi:

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<sup>83</sup> René Guénon, ‘Conversions’, in *Initiation and Spiritual Realization*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp. 62-64.

<sup>84</sup> A. Devaraja Mudaliar, ‘30-10-45 Afternoon’, in *Day by Day with Bhagavan* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2002), p.33.

<sup>85</sup> Sri Ramana Maharshi, quoted in Arthur Osborne, ‘Upadesa’, in *Ramana Maharshi and the Path of Self-Knowledge* (San Rafael, CA: Sophia Perennis, 2006), p. 112.

<sup>86</sup> Marco Pallis, quoted in Thomas Merton, *The Asian Journal of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1975), p. 208.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Merton, quoted in David D. Cooper (ed.), *Thomas Merton and James Laughlin: Selected Letters* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1997), p. 331.

“Yesterday afternoon I finished a remarkable book [Martin Lings, *A Moslem Saint of the Twentieth Century* (1961)]—the biography of Shaikh Ahmad al-‘Alawi, who died in Algeria in 1934. One of the greatest religious figures of this century, a perfect example of the Sufi [and Islamic] tradition in all its fullness and energy. This is one book that I want to read again. The excerpts from his writings are most impressive and I know I have not begun to appreciate their content.”<sup>88</sup>

It was Pallis who introduced Merton to the writings of the Traditionalist or Perennialist school, and was in correspondence with Merton in 1963. Pallis met Merton along with Richard C. Nicholson on 24th October 1964 at the Abbey of Gethsemani in Kentucky.<sup>89</sup> Merton also had written correspondence with other perennialists such as Martin Lings, Lord Northbourne (1896-1982), including the widow of Ananda K. Coomaraswamy, Doña Luisa Coomaraswamy (1905-1970), and met Huston Smith in Calcutta, India in 1968. Merton had intended to stay in Persia for a month through the invitation of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, but died en route in Thailand before reaching Tehran.<sup>90</sup> Merton was very much drawn by the perennial philosophy, and wrote the following statement on Schuon in a letter to Pallis, “In reading Schuon I have the impression that I am perhaps going along parallel to him, and once in a while I will get a glimpse of what he means in terms of my own tradition and experience.... I think [that he] has exactly the right view.... I appreciate Schuon more and more.”<sup>91</sup>

<sup>88</sup> Thomas Merton, ‘October 2, 1963’, in *The Journals of Thomas Merton, Vol. V: Dancing in the Waters of Life*, ed. Robert E. Daggy (San Francisco, CA: HarperCollins, 1997), p.115.

<sup>89</sup> See Rob Baker, ‘Merton, Marco Pallis, and the Traditionalists’, in *Merton and Sufism: The Untold Story: A Complete Compendium*, eds. Rob Baker and Gray Henry (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2005), pp.193-265.

<sup>90</sup> See Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ‘Preface: What Attracted Merton to Sufism’, in *Merton and Sufism: The Untold Story: A Complete Compendium*, eds. Rob Baker and Gray Henry (Louisville, KY: Fons Vitae, 2005), pp.9-13.

<sup>91</sup> Thomas Merton, *Hidden Ground of Love: The Letters of Thomas Merton on Religious Experience and Social Concerns*, ed. William H. Shannon (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1985), pp.469, 468 & 470.

Guénon, who held a great esteem for the Sage of Arunachala expressed: “[B]y virtue of its ‘spontaneous’ character Sri Ramana’s realisation represents a path that is rather exceptional”.<sup>92</sup> Due to the many ways in which this point could be interpreted, Hartung wanted to clarify this matter and wrote the following regarding Sri Ramana Maharshi and the question of initiation (*diksha*) and what Guénon referred to as his ‘action of presence.’<sup>93</sup>

“Arthur Osborne – like that which happened to me several years later – had heard some Europeans make a distinction between the influence that Bhagavan [Ramana Maharshi] radiated and initiation such as René Guénon had defined. Thus he posed to the Maharshi himself this question: [...] Ramana approved the point of view according to which his presence like his indications are practical means of spiritual realization (*sadhana*).”<sup>94</sup>

Osborne recalls one of the only indications if not the sole indication that overtly affirms the Maharshi’s granting the rite of initiation (*diksha*) when questioned by Louis Hartz: “‘I want Bhagavan’s initiation.’ Bhagavan replies: ‘You have it already.’ This is the only occasion of which I know when he explicitly confirmed having given initiation.”<sup>95</sup> One point of confusion stems from Ramana Maharshi’s insistence that he was not himself a guru, yet this appears to be due to his Vedantic perspective that saw no human individual as separate from himself—therefore there was no disciple or guru—only the Self (*Atman*) and the Transcendent Unity (*Paramatman*) that abides in the innermost heart of all. While initiation (*diksha*) is essential to embark on the path, it is only its beginning and not its end, for the

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<sup>92</sup> René Guénon, ‘Reviews of Books: Other Authors’, in *Studies in Hinduism*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), p.150.

<sup>93</sup> René Guénon, ‘Reviews of Books: Other Authors’, in *Studies in Hinduism*, trans. Henry D. Fohr, ed. Samuel D. Fohr (Ghent, NY: Sophia Perennis, 2001), pp.150-3.

<sup>94</sup> Henri Hartung, quoted in Xavier Accart, ‘Ramana Maharshi and René Guénon’, *The Mountain Path* (July 2007), p.102.

<sup>95</sup> Arthur Osborne, ‘Tribulation’, in *My Life and Quest* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2005), p. 86. See also Louis Hartz, “Silent Initiation,” *The Mountain Path*, Vol. 25, No. 1 (January 1988), pp.31-3.

way will certainly require spiritual practice (sadhana) and guidance. The Maharshi confirmed the need for grace and effort on the path: “If the guru could just give [us] Realization there would not be a cow left unrealized.”<sup>96</sup>

Given the unique nature of Sri Ramana Maharshi within this inverted spiritual era of the Kali-Yuga, he should not be taken to be a founder of a spiritual method which bypasses the guidance of a qualified spiritual master, nor an advocate for the circumventing of spiritual practice (sadhana) as many neo-advaitians or proponents of the New Age suggest.<sup>97</sup> A notable facet of the Maharshi’s teaching is that it was available to all who sought him out, which was exemplified by all of diverse individuals who came to him from all parts of the world, who had different faiths other than Hinduism, including some without a religious affiliation. This remarkable feature of the Maharshi’s teaching also presents some challenges regarding the ability of these different types of individuals to assimilate his teaching devoid of ritual and doctrinal support as it has been illustrated:

This aspect of the Maharshi’s life could be considered problematical, for, since he did not explicitly require from his visitors a traditional affiliation (the purpose of which is to guarantee a structure or framework for the spiritual journey), his non-Hindu followers for the most part remained without ritual and doctrinal support, and therefore did not prepare themselves to attain something solid and permanent in the spiritual way.<sup>98</sup>

The Maharshi received Hindu, non-Hindu or even the non-religious the same, for he did not want to withhold his darshan from anyone who desired it. Nevertheless it does not therefore suggest that to have a religion was unnecessary, on the contrary, for having

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<sup>96</sup> Arthur Osborne, ‘Tribulation’, in *My Life and Quest* (Tiruvannamalai: Sri Ramanasramam, 2005), p.87.

<sup>97</sup> Arthur Osborne, ‘Preface’, to *The Collected Works of Ramana Maharshi*, ed. Arthur Osborne (Boston, MA: Weiser Books, 1997), p.13.

<sup>98</sup> Mateus Soares de Azevedo, ‘Frithjof Schuon and Sri Ramana Maharshi: A Survey of the Spiritual Masters of the 20th Century’, *Sacred Web: A Journal of Tradition and Modernity*, Vol. 10 (Winter 2002), p.193.

a religion and committing oneself to it may very well have provided individuals with the framework needed to assimilate his teachings in a more integral way. As “Truth does not deny forms from the outside, but transcends them from within.”<sup>99</sup> One could very well suggest that by not having a traditional affiliation, it could ensnare the seeker at the surface level of the Maharshi’s ‘action of presence,’ preventing the individual from probing deeper into the darker facets of the empirical ego. A seeker could confuse the various phases of the mountain’s ascent for the summit itself without realizing that the top has never been reached. The trappings of the psychological order cannot be underestimated, as is evident in the ensuing:

The problem with the Maharshi, as someone told me, was that his spiritual radiance was so beautiful and so beneficent that people were unable to make the necessary ‘descent into hell’. They couldn’t get into the frame of mind required for this self-knowledge, because they were as it were plunged into an ecstasy from the fragrance, from the beatitude of his light; strangely enough, his light actually prevented them from going down into the dark depths of their own souls.”<sup>100</sup>

While many things could still be articulated about these two remarkable sages of the twentieth-century, René Guénon for resuscitating the Primordial Tradition and diagnosing the pathology of the modern world and Sri Ramana Maharshi an embodiment of Spiritual Realization as it was known in ancient India manifesting itself in this dark age, both of whom offer the most affirming message of hope, while fulfilling two distinct functions. In this era where confusion, if not abnormality reigns, and uncertainty is felt in every sphere of life, seekers are reassured by these two sages that there are indisputably answers for those who seek them. We can see the tremendous radiance of their intellectual and spiritual influence which continues to touch the hearts and minds of contemporaries,

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<sup>99</sup> Frithjof Schuon, ‘The Vedanta’, in *Language of the Self* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1999), p.40.

<sup>100</sup> Whitall N. Perry, quoted in Gray Henry, ‘Ways of Knowing: An Interview with Whitall N. Perry’, *Sophia: The Journal of Traditional Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (Winter 1997), p.111.

not only through Guénon and the Maharshi, but the vast web of individuals who have been moved by them and influence others in turn. The concentric rings of this influence, connecting innumerable individuals, is vast and of the highest order, unparalleled in these modern times. Guénon expresses the objective of his work:

“All that we can undertake now is to contribute, up to a point and as far as the means at our disposal allow, towards making such as are capable of it aware of some of the consequences which seem already fully established [the crisis of the modern and postmodern world]. By so doing we shall be preparing the ground, albeit in a partial and rather indirect manner, for those who must play their part in the future ‘judgment,’ following which a new era will open in the history of mankind.”<sup>101</sup>

Yet it is not numbers that are of interest, but those who sincerely pursue the uncoloured Truth in its fullness, and will be satisfied with nothing else, “Even if our writings had on the average no other result than the restitution, for some, of the saving barque that is prayer, we would owe it to God to consider ourselves profoundly satisfied.”<sup>102</sup> As René Guénon and Sri Ramana Maharshi were both quintessential universalists expressing the one Truth concealed in all of the diverse forms. We recall the decree of the sanatana dharma: “*Ekam sath vipra bahudha vadanti.*” (It is the one truth, which jnanins call by different names.) (*Rigveda* 1:164:46) And by the same principle, they would both affirm regardless of time or place, even under the most arduous conditions of this age, the abiding motto *vincit omnia veritas*, “Truth conquers all”.<sup>103</sup> ▲

(Concluded)

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<sup>101</sup> René Guénon, ‘Forward’, to *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Arthur Osborne (London: Luzac and Company, 1942), pp.4-5.

<sup>102</sup> Frithjof Schuon, ‘Forward’, to *The Play of Masks* (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom Books, 1992), p.vii.

<sup>103</sup> See René Guénon, ‘Some Conclusions’, in *The Crisis of the Modern World*, trans. Arthur Osborne (London: Luzac and Company, 1942), p.170.



# Maha Bhakta Vijayam

## Chapter Eleven

### The Old Brahmin Tainted by the Sin of Brahmahatya

NABAJI SIDDHA

While Tulasidas spent his days in the bliss of the Self, his wife, Mamata Devi planned to feed brahmins on the day of Dwadasi. Twelve thousand brahmins had come to take food in the Ashram on that day. The Lord came there in the form of a poor brahmin and asked Tulasidas, “O Swami! I am a poor brahmin and am hungry. Can I get some food here to appease the fire in my stomach?”

After ascertaining his Gotra or lineage, Tulasidas guided him to a seat among other brahmins. The illusory brahmin looked at the assembly and said, “O sadhus! All of you are very pure and pious souls whereas I am contaminated by a heinous sin. In the past, out of ignorance I killed a wise brahmin, a spiritual teacher. I came to Varanasi to take a dip in the holy Ganga to rid myself of the sin of brahmahatya caused by killing a brahmin. After the bath I became very hungry and came here looking for food. I have bared my heart and confessed the truth. Will you now allow me to sit with you in the feast?”

On hearing this, all the brahmins leapt to their feet and surrounding the old brahmin started abusing and thrashing him. They tried to push him out into the street. There was chaos all over the place. Tulasidas appealed to the brahmins to remain quiet and then turning to the poor man said to him with folded hands, "O noble brahmin! Please utter quickly 'Jai Sitaram' once so that all the dreadful sins sticking to you will leave you instantly and you will be completely purified of all sins."

After a brief silence, the cunning brahmin said, "O friend of the poor! I cannot make the utterance. My tongue refuses to move to pronounce this name; for, I have studied all scriptures, but I have not come across this name in them, nor have I heard this name ever. Even if I want to utter the name, my tongue falters. What am I to do?" He acted as if he was wearied of everything.

The brahmins disparagingly remarked, "No wonder, the name which is easily taken by everyone, refuses to roll on your tongue; for, you are such a terrible sinner. Afflicted as you are by brahmahatya, how can your lips move to repeat the name? Even if you utter the name, of what avail is it? It will bear no fruit. You rascal, get out of this place fast. You are not fit to eat with us. You are worse than the worst wretch, having killed a spiritual teacher."

Tulasidas was upset to hear the brahmins hurling abuses at the poor man. He said to the old brahmin, "O exalted brahmin! Haven't you ever heard this redeeming mantra glorified by all scriptures? If you have not come across this so far, let me repeat it for you once more." He repeated the name, "Jai Sitaram" in his ear.

The deceitful brahmin said, "I agree, 'Jai' is a good word, but the following name is an inauspicious word. None of you should pronounce it."

Surprised at this, Tulasidas asked, "Why do you reject the holy name which is chanted into the right ear of all the jivas at the time of their death by Lord Siva in Varanasi?"

The brahmin said contemptuously, "Fie... Fie...! Don't utter the inauspicious name which is repeated into the ear of a corpse! What is uttered on inauspicious occasions should not be spoken at other times."

“How can one reject the name which is constantly remembered by Siva? Don't abhor the holy name. This alone can liberate a person from the sin of brahmahatya. Say it quickly and redeem yourself,” cried Tulasidas in despair.

The old man grumbled, “You are trying to inflict the ominous word on me like forcing linga worship on an unwilling person. My mind will not change.”

Puzzled by the man's attitude, Tulasidas asked, “Who is your favourite deity?”

He said, “I worship Siva.”

“If so, why are you wearing the insignia of worshippers of Vishnu instead of holy ash?”

“Absent-mindedly, I must have drawn the lines vertically. Mostly, I worship Siva,” prevaricated the old man.

Tulasidas appealed, “Then take the name of Hara and His consort Uma.”

When the old man started repeating Hara! Uma! ... Hara! Uma!..., Tulasidas suggested to him cautiously to leave out the first part, ‘Ha and U’ in both names and join together the last part viz. ‘ra’ and ‘ma’ into one word and repeat it.”

The brahmin sprang to his feet with alacrity and said excitedly, “What do you mean? Leaving out the vowels in a word which are like life-force and utter a word starting with lifeless consonant? I will never, never utter even in dream a word which is devoid of the essence of Consciousness! No sadhu will put up with your gibberish!”

Looking at him fondly Tulasidas said, “It is alright if you don't want to utter it. But listen to it when I repeat the name. That will be enough to erase all your sins.” He repeated the name many times and then saying, “now all your sins have been reduced to nought. You have become pure and fully redeemed”, he forcibly made the brahmin sit near him and join the feast.

However, other brahmins objected to this and said, “O Swami, is it possible for brahmahatya, the vilest of sins to be eradicated just by uttering or hearing the name, ‘Jai Sitaram’? One has to repeat the name or japa for a long time and perform expiatory acts to be freed

of this most heinous sin. Then only, he becomes fit to join other brahmins and sit with them in the feast. While it is so, whatever you are doing now, is improper.”

Tulasidas said, “All our scriptures — smritis, srutis, puranas — and great epics have declared that uttering or listening even once to ‘Rama’ is enough to put to flight all sins. He has listened to me repeating the name several times. Then, how can the sin of brahmahatya still cling to him?”

The brahmins remonstrated, “Killing a saintly brahmin is worse than killing a woman or child which in itself is deplorable. When someone does these terrible things deliberately, violating the life force, the offenders cannot be spared easily. That is why, great beings have prescribed repetition of the name for a long time and also other expiatory rites. He is very evil, having killed a brahmin who had realized the Brahman. It is no wonder, the name Rama cannot be pronounced by his tongue! He is defiled, how can he join our company?”

Tulasidas said, “O learned ones! Didn’t you hear him utter, ‘Hara, Uma’ which contains the redeeming mantra? When Lord Vishnu incarnated as king Dasaratha’s son, sage Vasishtha pondered over an appropriate name for the divine child. Then combining a part of both names, he named the child ‘Rama’. You are aware of the greatness of the name.”

He continued further, “Let me elaborate on the inestimable power of the name of the Lord who sports in the hearts of devotees. ‘Ra’ brings out all the sins from the depths of consciousness and ‘Ma’ eradicates them without a trace. I will make it more clear: when you utter ‘Ra’ the mouth opens and with ‘Ma’ the mouth closes. ‘Ra’ is Adi Siva and ‘Ma’ is Adi Sakti, the primordial Power; ‘Ra’ is Para Brahman and ‘Ma’ is Chit Sakti, the power of Consciousness; ‘Ra’ is Atma, the Pure Consciousness, the Witness or the Overself and ‘Ma’ is Jiva, the embodied soul; ‘Ra’ is contemplation on Para Brahman and ‘Ma’ is worship of the Trinity of gods; at the uttering of ‘Ra’ sins will not approach you and at ‘Ma’ the god of death will flee. At the utterance of the word ‘Rama’, the cord with which the god of death

binds the souls breaks and all fear of torments of hell vanishes. The name is so potent that unmentionable diseases like leprosy get cured, abject poverty and humiliation are eradicated and prosperity with eight-fold riches blossoms; one will master all branches of knowledge, all wishes of heart are fulfilled. At the sound of 'Ma', one is freed of sins like brahmahatya and the empire of mukti is bestowed on him; one's life span increases and one remains free of diseases. This is the all-redeeming mantra, it sets fire to all three kinds of karma. This is the way to salvation. This name, the redeeming mantra pervades the entire universe eternally."

But the other brahmins were unswayed by this powerful acclamation. Carrying in his hand the leaf on which the old man's food had been served, Tulasidas said, "There is only one way to set your doubts at rest. I shall soon prove to you the power of the name of Rama. Let us all go to Lord Viswanatha's temple."

On reaching the temple, he placed the leaf in front of the stone idol of Nandi and prostrating to the Lord repeatedly adored Him, "Harahara! Mahadeva! Vamadeva! Neelakanta! Sambava! Sankara! Umapati! Adimurti! One who roams care-free in the cremation ground and resides in Kailash! Three-eyed One! Lord of all! Supreme One! Lord of all ghouls! One who dances in the cremation ground, holding the skulls in one hand! One who rides the divine bull! One who is charmed by the Ganga!"

Overcome by ecstasy, dancing and singing rapturously, he addressed the Nandi, "If it is true that Lord Narayana, the Source of all, is the essence of Siva-Sakti, Hara-Uma and the power of first syllable 'Ra' can reduce all sins including brahmahatya to nothing, then partake of the food placed before you, quell the cynicism of these sadhus, absolve this old brahmin of brahmahatya, uphold the supreme power of the name and enslave me by Your grace!"

To the amazement of all, the Divine Bull came alive bellowing forth from the stone and then kneeling on its front legs, prostrated to the Lord disguised as the brahmin afflicted by brahmahatya and then consumed the food offered along with the leaf in one gulp and turned back into a stone idol after endorsing the glory of the name. There was

a profuse shower of flowers from heaven accompanied by sound of celestial trumpets. Tulasidas worshipped the Lord and the Divine Bull and turning to the brahmins asked if there were any more doubts.

Tulasidas said, "You have witnessed a great miracle before your eyes. What more proof does one require for the greatness of the name? It is as clear as daylight. While such a simple way is available to cross over the insurmountable hurdles of life like affliction of brahmahatya, why resort to cumbersome and complicated ways of yajna and expiation? Why spend lifetimes in arguments over rites and rituals? Why did you deride the Brahmin, placing no faith in my words? You became a prey to doubts! When even the single syllable 'Ra' is so potent, will there be a limit to the benefits that the whole word 'Rama' can confer on us? If one takes the name with love and devotion, can sins ever enter one's neighbourhood? Will Yama, the lord of death dare to toss his noose on such a person?" Elated by the amazing scene enacted in the temple and dwelling on the name's glory, the saint was absorbed in divine mood, his face radiant with spiritual light.

The sadhus were also wonderstruck with the amazing event. The saint's words acted on them like the sun rays that disperse the massive dark clouds of ignorance. Freed from the tangles of doctrines, they revelled in bliss and joined Tulasidas in adoration. Shouting, 'Jai Sitaram', and inebriated with ecstasy, they danced their way back to Ashram to the chant of Ram.

The miracle softened the hard layer of their rigid orthodoxy. They bowed to Tulasidas and said, "Today, we have realized the unfailing power of the name in burning down all impurities. Let us have our food together."

They honoured the old brahmin with loving hospitality, filled his leaf with delicious food and partook of the food together with Tulasidas and the old man, as the prasad of the saint and thus lightened the burden of their karmas. They looked upon Tulasidas as the very Lord himself and were proud of their great fortune of being in his company. After the feast, they smeared on the old brahmin sandal and other fragrant unguents, offered betel-leaves and nuts and praised the glory of Tulasidas.

The brahmins became contrite about how they had wasted their lives in futile talks and turned to Tulasidas for light and guidance. They realised that it was beyond them to measure the depth of Tulasidas' devotion and goodness and were overwhelmed by the blessedness of his company. They spent the whole day in satsang and became slowly absorbed in contemplation of the Lord.

The deceitful Lord in the brahmin's disguise was ill at ease fearing that soon Tulasidas would discover his identity. He would close and open his eyes stealthily now and then, contemplating his next move. At dusk, all sadhus came out of their meditation and set out towards the river Bhagirathi for their evening ablutions.

At that hour, Mamata Devi came there to pay her respects to Tulasidas as was her practice every morning and evening. Looking at her, the brahmin pretended to have fallen head over heels in love with her.

He got up excitedly and told Tulasidas, "O Tulasidas, I am stricken with passion for this woman. Do you know who she is? Will you take me to her house? Ah.. ah...! She has stolen my heart! I have lost control of my senses. This moment you should do something to assuage this burning fever in my heart for her." The old man went on blabbering along this line.

Fearing that if the other sadhus came to learn of this turn of events, they would be furious with this man and tear him to pieces. Tulasidas, looking to the left and right to make sure that none was within earshot, said to him, "O Swami! Please don't talk loudly. If the sadhus come to know, all hell will be let loose. Be quiet for sometime, please. I will take you to her at night."

But the crafty fellow went on urging Tulasidas and said loudly, "Where did the girl disappear after setting my senses aflame with desire? Even Siva who reduced Manmatha to ashes couldn't help falling for Ganga! Where am I, a poor mortal!"

Frightened out of his wits, Tulasidas made frantic signs by hands and mouth to the old man to keep quiet. The old man flung his arms, jumped and ran up and down like a street clown.

The sadhus who returned from their evening practices at the river were infuriated at the old man's new antics. They started belabouring him with hands and sticks and abused him in vile language for his inappropriate conduct, "You rascal! You want to bite the hand which fed and redeemed you. Don't you know Mamata Devi is the noble wife of this great saint?"

Tulasidas became annoyed at the treatment meted out to the poor old man. Dragging him away from that place, he took him to Mamata Devi and apprising her of the situation said, "O Mamata Devi! This great being is like my own soul. You are truly a noble woman and a faithful wife, who craves for my love and yearns for salvation. Therefore, I expect that you will not contradict your husband's wish that you should fulfil this man's desire."

Mamata Devi, looking at the husband who spoke to her after twelve years of total rejection, said, "Am I not yours always? Who can deny you the privilege of gifting away your own possession? Does a faithful wife have any God other than her husband? I will certainly comply with your words. Didn't Siva act similarly when Parvati was desired by Ravana? However, it is your part to prevent any harm befalling this man at the hands of the brahmins."

When Mamata Devi prostrated at the feet of the old man and tried to guide him into the house, the sadhus came chasing after the betrayer and hit him hard saying, "You degenerate creature! Aren't you ashamed of your conduct towards this exalted woman? If you don't leave this place at once, we will wring your neck." The sadhus jumped on the man from all directions and thrashed him with hands, feet and sticks. With the shower of indiscriminate blows, the old man fell down unconscious.

Driven to red-hot fury, Tulasidas caught hold of a sword and leaping into the midst of the sadhus and wielding the sword freely, inflicted mortal wounds on the sadhus.

Returning to the brahmin, he was grieved to see his unconscious condition. He told Mamata Devi, "Dear woman! Please nurse this brahmin lovingly back to consciousness by sprinkling rose water and conduct yourself according to his wish." He went outside and stood



guard with the sword in hand like Lord Ganesha at the entrance of Parvati's abode or Lord Vasudeva at the gate of Mahabali or Lord Krishna protecting the Pandavas.

In the meantime, Mamata Devi sprinkling cool rose water on the old man's face tried to revive him. But there was no response. He was lying motionless like a corpse. Tulasidas took him inside and laid him on a soft bed. Mamata Devi tried in several ways till midnight to restore him to normal consciousness, but to no avail.

Panicking at his condition, Mamata Devi reported to her husband, "O Swami, he appears to be dead."

Rushing to the brahmin's side, Tulasidas turned him from side to side. Finding no sign of life, he wailed loudly, "O these wicked sadhus have done him to death. They are indeed demons. Now what will I do?" Bewildered by the situation, he tried to kill himself with the sword.

Knowing his intention, the Lord who was lying still like a corpse, sat up promptly and appearing in the form of Lord Rama caught hold of Tulasidas' hand and said, "O exalted being! you didn't hesitate to make over even your wife to a wicked old man! You are like the self-luminous sun! How can anyone praise your glory? Which aspect of your greatness shall I extol? I have not known a noble being like you in any Age! What worthy boon can I confer on you? Is it possible for any one to send his wife whole heartedly to another man?"

Praising him profusely, the Lord showered his benign love on Tulasidas. Then he revived all the brahmins and blessed both Tulasidas and Mamata Devi to live together and enjoy all sweet blessedness in life.

Tulasidas said, "O Lord, do You intend to cast the Maya's spell on me again and ruin my dispassion? With Your deceitful play, You deluded me. Even if the vomit is sweet pudding, will anyone in right mind lick it? After adopting a life of sannyas, is it fair to be pushed back into samsara? Once a sacred vow is taken, can it be revoked? For one who has experienced the eternal bliss, the transient pleasures are mere baubles. Will a person who is enjoying the delights of heaven, be interested in peeping into hell? O Lord! I, who sought refuge in

You, was debased. Will I ever feel inclined again to fall into the same pit? The moment I left the house, all thoughts of bodily pleasures left me and I was transported to peace. I have suffered enough on account of my past conduct.”

“The deer, elephant, moth, fish and bee – these five endanger their lives due to attraction for sense of sound, touch, sight, taste and smell respectively. When a man is allured by all the five senses caused by intimacy with a woman, where is the way out for him? Though it is comforting to scratch a wound, it will only increase the agony later. Likewise, one who loses himself in sense gratification will live to regret it. By the lure of sex and procreation, O Lord! You want to expand Your creation and carry on the world-play. But having secured Your grace, should I be again ensnared in samsara which is like wallowing in filth! Who would want to enter the realm of ignorance after having tasted the nectar of Your name? Knowingly will anyone partake of poison?”

“O Lord! I have learnt about Your deceitful ways. Therefore, don't utter these words. Be gracious and take me under Your care. I will not enter samsara, forsaking adoration and singing of Your glories. This is the only way I wish to spend the rest of my life.” He appealed to the Lord in this way.

The Lord persisted, “Like Parasurama who slayed his mother without contradicting his father, or like Veda Vyasa who implicitly obeyed his mother Satyavati in perpetuating the line of Kuru or the Pandava brothers who accepted Draupadi as their wife in obedience to their mother Kunti's command, O my dear devotee! without disregarding My wish, please live as a householder with Mamata Devi who is a rare jewel of womanhood. After sometime, you will surely attain Me.”

Tulasidas was firm in his resolve. He said, “O Lord, whatever Your command may be excepting that of entering the samsaric life, I will comply with it. Please confer on Mamata who has taken complete shelter in You, the highest realm.”

The Lord seeing his determination spoke further, “O Tulasidas, in your previous birth as the hunter, when you were totally absorbed in repeating ‘Mara, Mara’ in solitude, your wife could not bear the

separation from you. She pestered you to return home. Just to escape from her for the time being, you assured her that you would come home later. After this, you entered a dense forest where neither human nor demon would dare to enter and lost yourself in deep contemplation and soon were buried under an anthill. Your wife searched for you in all corners and tormented by sorrow she left her body soon. When you incarnated as Tulasidas, she also took rebirth to rejoin you. So you are bound by your words to her to live with her and fulfil the promise you made to her.”

Tulasidas replied, “O Lord, I have already fulfilled my words by living with her for many years. When she became annoyed with my attendance on her, I left her, overcome by dispassion. Just as a stone broken to pieces cannot be joined together, there is no chance for us to live together,” said Tulasidas.

The Lord looked kindly at the noble woman who cherished her husband and said, “O blessed lady! Do you desire the welfare of this world or that of the other world?”

She replied, “O Lord! Is it right to force something on a person who abhors it? He has no feeling for me and there is never going to be a cordial partnership between us as husband and wife. Yet I would like to spend the rest of my life in his company.”

Tulasidas intervened and said, “O Mamata! Now, don't let go of such a precious opportunity to attain to the exalted realm of Sri Hari. I will join you there later. Please don't oppose my wish.”

Mamata Devi consented to abide by his wish. She fixed her mind on the Lord who sent for Pushpaka Vimana, the divine aerial vehicle, to take Mamata Devi to His realm. She prostrated to her husband and said, “If I had committed any lapse in my service to you, kindly forgive me. Whatever be my transgressions, please treat them as trivial and give me leave.”

Tulasidas said, “You are indeed a blessed woman that the Lord himself is taking you to His heavenly abode in the presence of all of us. You are highly honoured. This is a rare privilege bestowed on you.”

Mamata Devi ascended to Vaikunta accompanied by the sound of heavenly music and showers of flowers.

## MOUNTAIN PATH

The inmates of the Ashram were greatly amazed by the succession of miraculous events and praised Mamata Devi and Tulasidas. They also felt contrite over their violent behaviour towards the old brahmin who was the Lord himself. When the king of Varanasi heard about the happenings, he visited Tulasidas and praising him, said, "O Swami, how fortunate for us that you live in our city and sanctify our lives. We must have done great merits in the past to deserve such a blessing."

Tulasidas became overwhelmed by the unmotivated compassion of the Lord. Thinking about it, he was bathed in torrents of bliss and gratitude. ▲

*(To be continued)*

## From A Lost Original

Upahar

In the corner of some eternal room, at the loose end of a dream,  
A riddle was proposed:  
What is it that is, then isn't, that is, then isn't, that is, that isn't?

A quiet, tired man, endlessly refilling his pipe, answered:  
'The sound of the last raindrop at my window.'

And old woman, keen-eyed, immobile, testified:  
'The white cat who comes and goes'.

A girl with bright hair, casting an invisible net, suggested fluently:  
'The moon, the moment, music'.

A bearded dwarf, with a great book chained to his back, declared:  
'The world'.

And one unknown, scanning all those faces as the dream fell away,  
Was heard to whisper:  
'I'.

TRANSLATION

# Ozhivil Odukkam

KANNUDAIYA VALLALAR  
TRANSLATED BY ROBERT BUTLER  
COMMENTARY BY S. RAM MOHAN  
AND ROBERT BUTLER

The way in which the disciple is killed [by the word of the master], yet still lives, may be compared to a wife dying on merely hearing of the death of her husband; to milk [which boils over in an instant]; to a deeply devoted wife, immolating herself on her husband's funeral pyre; to a loving widow [who remains faithful to her husband even after he dies], or to the generosity of Karna at the time of his death. (78)

**I**n this verse the woman who has lost her husband is used three times as a term of comparison. In the first two instances, the widow stands

Robert Butler devotes his time to the translation of Tamil classical and spiritual texts. He has published a grammatical commentary on *Ulladu Narpadu*, and a translation of the biography of Manikkavacagar. These are available for online preview, purchase or download at the following link: <http://stores.lulu.com/store.php?fAcctID=1212666>.

for the ego, the personal self, which is annihilated immediately on the mature disciple hearing the words of the guru. In the third, the widow stands for the disciple himself, who on hearing the word of the guru abandons all ideas of 'I' and 'mine', just as the faithful widow gives up her previous worldly existence on the death of her husband.

In the reference to milk it is not clear which property of milk is being referred to. One possibility is that it is a reference to the way in which a tiny amount of curd is sufficient to 'seed' a whole dish of milk, leaving nothing of the original milk, just as a word from the guru is sufficient to entirely transform the consciousness of the ripe disciple in an absolute and irreversible fashion.

The reference to Karna at the end of the verse requires some explanation. Karna is a major character in the *Mahabharata* who fought on the side of Dhritarastra against the sons of Pandu. Karna had been born to Kunti by the sun god Surya, before her marriage to Pandu. Abandoned at birth, he had been adopted by Adhiratha, a great comrade of Dhritarastra, and thus came to fight against his own half-brothers, the sons of Pandu, in the Kurukshetra battle.

Different accounts of Karna's act of generosity at the time of his death are given in the Sanskrit *Mahabharata* of Vyasa and in the Tamil *Villiparatam* of Villiputtur. In the latter Krishna approaches Karna in the guise of a Brahmin, asking for alms. Being on the battlefield Karna has nothing to offer. The Brahmin reminds him that he can give him the mountain-like punya which he has accumulated throughout his life with his matchless generosity. Karna agrees. Krishna then reveals his true identity and leaves, having rendered Karna capable of being killed by Arjuna through the loss of the merit which had previously protected him. In the Sanskrit *Mahabharata*, in which Karna's vulnerability to Arjuna is established very early on in his life, a much lesser degree of generosity is involved. In order to resolve a dispute over whose son is the greater, Karna's father, Surya and Arjuna's father, Indra appear as Brahmins on the battlefield. Karna, having nothing to offer, breaks off his gold teeth and gives them to the Brahmins, thus establishing his superiority. Chidambara swamigal

assumes that the former account is being referred to here as he glosses: *like the generosity of Karna, through which, at the time of his death, being mindful of his next birth, he gave up to a Brahmin all the merit he had accumulated.*

Just as the gold which the goldsmith melts down in his crucible is of various degrees of purity, the results of the master's teaching, though taken from the Siva Agamas and clearly conveyed, will vary, depending upon the degree of ripeness of the disciple. Know that all do not share the same degree of maturity. (79)

The Tamil word used in this verse is *marru*, which is the technical term for *the degree of fineness of gold*, which was determined by the touchstone. See v. 68 for information on the use of the touchstone. To refine gold, the goldsmith would place gold of various degrees of purity in a crucible and melt it down, skimming off the impurities that rose to the surface. If the gold contained a lot of impurities it would take longer to refine and might need to be smelted a number of times, getting gradually purer. However, whatever the degree of purity, there was only the one process for refining it. In the same way the master's teachings, though derived from the Saiva Agamas and the same for all, will take more or less time to bear fruit, depending upon the maturity of the disciple.

The true reality of the life of the householder will become clear [to those of low spiritual maturity] only very slowly. It can be compared to carving a statue by gradually chipping away the stone, or to the process of purifying muddy water with clearing nut. In the end this ancient world will be as repulsive to him as rice vomited up. Like the stem of a plantain tree placed on the fire, [very slow to burn], true knowledge (*jnana*) will arise in him only very slowly. (80)

## MOUNTAIN PATH

The subjects of this verse are the aspirants who possess the lowest grade of spiritual maturity, those who are *mantataram* – *exceedingly slow* to respond to the teachings of the guru. The *Clearing-nut tree*, *Strychnos potatorum* is a deciduous tree which grows up to forty feet in height. Its Tamil name is *cillam* and its Hindi name is *nirmali*. The seeds of the tree are commonly used in traditional medicine as well as in purifying water in India and Myanmar. The state of being in which one is involved in worldly attachments is compared to murky water; just as the clearing-nut slowly causes the clear water to separate out from the muddy sediment, the teaching of the guru will gradually purify the consciousness of the disciple, eliminating those attachments.

For those whose nature can be moulded as one would forge an image in iron, true knowledge will be won [more swiftly], as fire will burn green firewood. Then, like a drop of rain sliding from the leaf of a lotus, their worldly life will fall away. Divorced from them, the entire world will appear like a mirage. (81)

The devotees of the next to lowest degree of attainment will gain *jnana* in the manner of green wood, which will burn well enough along with a few pieces of dry firewood. Chidambara swamigal sums up the meaning of the verse as follows: *Just as green wood will burn with the help of a few pieces of firewood, jnana will arise in them through a few words of instruction.*

The lotus leaf possesses a complex composition which repels water from its surface, reducing it to tiny droplets and causing it to run off the leaf if it is tilted; not only that, any dirt particles on the leaf adhere to the droplets of water which thus cleanse the leaf. Hence those who are able to live in the world without being contaminated by it are compared to the lotus leaf, which remains dry and clean, even whilst living in a wet, muddy environment.



[For the next highest class], to remove the body's inherited dispositions [and bestow *jnana*] will be like [carving] a wooden doll. [*Jnana* will arise in them swiftly], as fire consumes charcoal. They will be indifferent to the household they had previously cherished. It will be like a place of general assembly to them. Even the life of the gods will seem like an insubstantial dream. (82)

This first part of this verse is extremely elliptical, but the intended meaning is reasonably clear from what precedes it. Since the two preceding verses dealt with the two lowest grades of seeker, it can be assumed that the next to highest grade, *tivira paccuvar*, are being described here. Since the first two verses referred, respectively, to the shaping of stone and iron, this phrase may be assumed to be referring to the carving or shaping of wood, and that what is being compared to fire burning charcoal is the action of *jnana* in swiftly consuming the conditional awareness of the disciple.

The significance of the phrase *the body's inherited dispositions* is that aspirants of this degree of maturity will no longer have any need to remove their *bodha vathanai* – *inherited dispositions related to sensual desire*, since these will already have been transcended.

The idea expressed in the final line seems to be that, although we cannot experience the life of the gods, we feel assured that it is vastly more pleasurable than this earthly life. However even such pleasures, as we might imagine them, will seem ephemeral and insubstantial to the *tivira paccuvar*.

For [those whose nature is easily moulded, like] dolls made out of butter, the acquisition of *jnana* will be swift, like squirrel fur or cotton falling into the flame of a lamp. For them there are no desires. Tears will pour down from their eyes; oblivious to time, sobbing and melting inwardly, they will laugh and cry by turns, and the hair of their bodies will stand on end. (83)

[In those of the highest degree of maturity] the in-dwelling *anavam* and the outer *kanmam* and *mayai* have become separated [from their true self], just as the fruit of the tamarind becomes separate from its shell when ripe, and the seeds of future *kanmam* have been thus annihilated, just as an eyeless needle cannot be threaded. For such as these this freedom from desire is the bliss of the Self. (84)

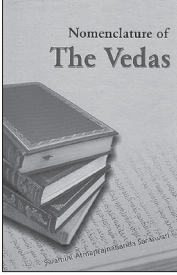
The text simply says *that which sprouts within along with that which is exterior*. Chidambara swamigal identifies *that which sprouts within* as *anavam*, the principle of egoity that is intimately associated with the *jiva* in an inward sense, yet eternally separate from it, and that which is outside as the other two *malams*, *mayai* and *kanmam*, the *world illusion* and the self-perpetuating deeds and their fruits, which affect the *jiva* in an outward sense, and must be eradicated before the inwardly dwelling *anavam* can be tackled. For those preferring an interpretation more in line with Advaita Vedanta we might say *that that which sprouts within* is the mind and *that which is exterior* is the senses and their activity.

*The fruit of the puli – tamarind tree* is a long, green pod. When it ripens, the outer shell becomes brown and brittle, at which point the brown pulp containing the seeds becomes detached from the shell and is quite easy to extract. Just as the brittle shell of the ripe tamarind fruit will fall away easily, the conditional awareness of the ripe disciple will be easily eradicated by the word of the guru. At this point the ego, the sense of a personal self, has died, and the disciple cannot create any further *kanmam* for himself, since there is no longer an ‘himself’ to perform that *kanmam* or experience its effects. The actions of his physical body are now those of the Self, Sivam.

Towards the end of the verse there is a play on the word *pacam* which means *thread* as well as having the familiar meaning *worldly bondage*. Just as thread (*pacam*) cannot follow a needle without an eye, *kanmam – actions and their fruits* cannot become associated with those who have abandoned worldly attachments (*pacam*). ▲

(To be continued)

# BOOK REVIEWS



**NOMENCLATURE OF THE VEDAS** by Swamini Atmaprajnananda Saraswati. DK Printworld, New Delhi, 2012. Pp 234, Rs.600. ISBN812460644-7.

This very well-written book will be welcomed by all lovers of the Vedas. In barely 200 pages, it tells us all about the four Vedas, Rg, Yajur, Sama and Atharva in a very simple, jargon-free style which even those bereft of even a modicum of Sanskrit knowledge can easily follow: definition, compilation, their period, antiquity, comparison between them, what the great seer Vyasa did to them, their divisions into karma and jnana Kandas and into Samhitas, Brahmanas, Aranyakas and Upanishads, clear, adequate explanations of these, tabulations, the various *Sakhas* (branches) of the Samhitas, both lost and the extant, a map of Vedic India showing the geographic spread of the Sakhas, and so on.

The Rgveda, the most ancient of the four and the largest with its 10552 mantras, and, above all, the basis of the Vedic literature, is dealt with in the longest chapter. Of the two types of nomenclature in the division of the Rgveda, namely, mandala and ashtaka, the author has chosen the former, the more systematic, throughout the chapter to illustrate the various parts of the Rgvedic tree, its ten mandalas, authorship, number of *Suktas* (hymns) and the total number of *Rcas* (mantras) in all these hymns.

We are told that the sage seers who authored the mantras or, rather, to whom they were revealed, had calculated these divisions so minutely as to guard against interpolation or misreading. There are 10,552 mantras or 10,580 by another count, 153,826 words and 4,32,000 syllables in the Rgveda. To take one mandala for example, Mandala V was authored by Sage Atri and family. An Atreya of today, innocent of the Vedas, might like to sample a Mantra of the Rshi Atri who lived

## MOUNTAIN PATH

4,000 years ago if not earlier. Mantra 5 of Sukta 82 of Mandala V runs as follows in English translation:

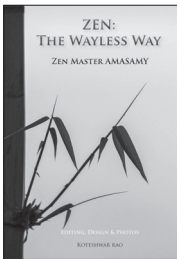
Savita! God! Send far away all evil;  
Send us what is good.

Which means destroy our ego and grant us the Bliss of Selfhood.

In briefer chapters the author does equal justice to the less voluminous Vedas in words and through tabulations. The Yajurveda, as the word yajus indicates, is a collection of sacrificial formulae and mainly deals with Vedic rituals. Samaveda, as the word Saama denotes, brings equipoise to the mind by its music. It is a collection of Rgvedic hymns set to music (divided into village music and forest music), the ancient Mother of modern Indian classical music. Atharvaveda is the only one of the four Vedas that has no connection with *Yagas* (sacrifices). It is a valuable source of our ancient folklore. It is a very fascinating, controversial and a very uneven field, and is dealt with in a very interesting, informative chapter of the book.

The author tells about the phenomenal contribution in the field of Vedic studies by Western orientalists like Wilson, Max Mueller, Roh, Weber, India-born Macdonnell, Winternitz, Keith and others and Indian commentators from Saunaka (pre-700 BCE), Panini (around 500 BCE) and Sayana (before CE 1315-1387) to Satvalekar, Sri Aurobindo (whose *The Secret of the Vedas* is one of the most important and original books written on the Vedas), Kapali Sastri and Shriram Acharya of our times. The Glossary, Bibliography and Index are very helpful.

— Atreya



ZEN: The Wayless Way by Fr. Ama Samy (ed. Koteswar Rao). Published 2013 by Bodhizendo Perumalmai, Kodaikanal, India. 624104. Rs.300, pp. 231. [www.bodhizendo.org](http://www.bodhizendo.org)

Having trained with Yamada Koun Roshi of Kamakura in a lineage that embraces both the Soto and Rinzi traditions of Japan, Fr. Ama Samy draws from long

decades of experience as a Zen teacher and a Jesuit priest. The present collection of articles covers significant ground and stands as one of the author's finest efforts. Focusing on a critique of contemporary Zen including edited transcriptions of *teishos* (dharma discourses) given at Bodhizendo during *sesshin* (intensive meditation retreats), essays are interspersed with koans from the *Denkoroku* or 'The Transmission of Light', the koan collection by the late 13th century master Keizan Jokin (dharma grandson of Dogen Zenji). These 'cases' or riddles, presented together with photographs in a fittingly minimalist style, give pause for reflection and serve to uphold the book's Zen undercurrent, bridging gaps between sometimes disparate themes that include among other things — psychology, philosophy, Christian theology, neuroscience, mindfulness, compassion, ethics, the question of God, questions surrounding death and dying and the meaning of awakening.

Zen is unique among the world's religions in that it endeavours to draw attention away from the habitual labelling mind, i.e. representation and what can be surmised about the nature of reality in the abstract, and rather, compels the practitioner to attend to what is present before her at any given concrete instant, affirming each thing in the world as it is. Zen is a creed without a credo and requires only that one be willing to let go of the infatuation with conceptual thinking and to replace it with mindfulness and pure awareness, observing whatever presents itself moment by moment. Koan practice, while steeped in the tradition of Tang dynasty Chan, is nevertheless designed to engender this shift. A teaching outside the scriptures, Zen is "not based on theories or doctrines, but on paying attention to what is and what one experiences in body, mind and environment."

— Michael Highburger



# ASHRAM BULLETIN

## Karthikai Deepam Festival 2014

The annual Festival began with the flag-hoisting ceremony at the Main Shrine of the Big Temple on Wednesday morning at 6am, the 26th November. A large crowd gathered for the event in the main courtyard of the Arunachaleswara temple. The temple processional deities (*utsavars*) were brought out of the Main Shrine and placed adjacent to the flagpole. The official festivities started with the hoisting of the Temple flag to the accompaniment of cannon blasts at 6.30am. Later the festival's first procession started at 10.30am that morning.

Karthikai Deepam day falls on or very near the full-moon day in the month of *Karthikai* (mid-November to mid-December) when the moon is in conjunction with *Krittika nakshatra*. The deepam signifies Lord Siva taking the form of a large column of fire to settle the dispute between Brahma and Vishnu. Also, on this auspicious occasion, Parvati is merged with Siva, in the form of Ardhhanarishvara. There is a curious ceremony which occurs at the last minute before the flame is lit in front of the great temple flag mast. The *utsavar* of Ardhhanarishvara is brought out from the inner temple. The palanquin is carried in a swift bouncing action, presented to the yet unlit flame and then quickly taken back into the inner temple by jumping-dancing volunteers.

The Karthikai Mahadeepam flame was lit at 5.58pm Friday, the 5th December. As soon as the  *jyoti*  was sighted, ashram devotees, who had gathered in front of Bhagavan's samadhi, chanted his *Arunachala Stuti Panchakam*, after the ashram's own deepam strategically positioned in line with Bhagavan's samadhi was lit.

Bhagavan wrote about Deepam: "Getting rid of the 'I am the body' idea and turning the mind inwards and merging it in the Heart to realize the real, non-dual and effulgent Self, is the real significance of seeing the beacon of light on Annamalai, the centre of the universe."

One of the major events occurred on the seventh day. The temple town reverberated with chants of 'Annamalaiyanukku Arohara' and glimmered in festive mood as five holy cars of Tiruvannamalai temple rolled on the Mada streets on Tuesday, the 2nd December. The mass crowd either

pulled the huge wooden *rathas* (chariots) bearing the deities, or witnessed the majesty of the *rathas* slowly moving along the four streets. The first of the five *rathas* bearing the idol of Vinayaka started its procession by 6.30am., followed by that of Muruga. The big *ratha*, called Periya Ther, carrying Lord Arunachaleswara and His consort started its majestic procession by 1pm. The big car returned to the front of the main entrance of the temple at around 7pm. The separate *ratha* of Unnamulai Amman, the consort of the presiding deity was pulled exclusively by women and the chariot of Chandikeshwarar was hauled by boys.

The Municipality screened all devotees who climbed Arunachala during the festival and confiscated all disposable plastic items and inflammable materials such as matchboxes, rockets and camphor, which are not allowed on the hill during the festival. Every year, small or large forest fires had broken out during Deepam and destroyed considerable patches of green cover. The forest fires also threaten the safety of the devotees climbing down after dark. It was reported that the wick used for the cauldron was several hundred metres long and three tonnes of ghee were consumed. Several lakh devotees did *giri pradakshina* on the night.

### **Sri Ramanasramam Vedic Chanting**

Deepam Festival opening day saw a record 60 Ghanapaatins at the samadhi of Bhagavan. Other Vedic groups commenced chanting programmes at the main temple. Shukla Yajur Veda, Rig Veda, and Sama Veda groups performed in Bhagavan's Shrine during the course of the ten days leading up to Karthikai Mahadeepam.

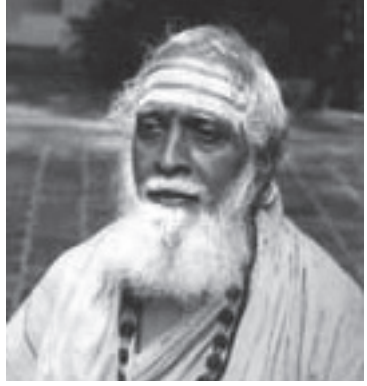
### **Obituaries**

**Ilse Lowenstern**, most probably the oldest Western student of Sri Ramana Maharshi, merged in the Self on November 7th 2014. She was born near Frankfurt, Germany in 1911. Having escaped Nazi Germany as a Jew, she taught English in North India, where she read Paul Brunton's *A Search in Secret India*. She first visited Tiruvannamalai and received Bhagavan's darshan in 1940. It was his deep 'Silence' she felt most attracted to. Later in life she returned to Germany as an English, German and Music Teacher, and continued her inner journey and love towards Bhagavan with several visits to

the Ashram until 1990. She was an avid reader of *Mountain Path*. She was a trusting, loving, self-reliant and friendly devotee.

### Swami Shantananda Puri

Born on 6th May, 1928 (*Anuradha*), Swami Shantananda Puri hailed from Tiruvaiyaru. A disciple of Swami Purushottamananda Puri of Vasishta Guha, (a disciple of Sri Ramakrishna's disciple, Swami Brahmananda), Swamiji took *sannyasa diksha* in Uttar Kashi in 1992. Versed in *Gita*, *Bhagavatam*, *Yoga Vashishta* and *Ashtavakra Gita*, together with his vast knowledge of Sanskrit, Swamiji was respected for his deftness in answering listener's questions. His doors were always open to sincere devotees. He wrote more than 30 sadhana-friendly books. His writing was unpretentious and light-hearted, laced with humour and informed philosophical depth. Fond of story-telling, he often illustrated



the subtler aspects of advaitic teaching with anecdotes and stories. His commentaries and synopses covered works dear to Ramana devotees, as well as the great classics such as the *Kenopanishad*, *Narada Bhakti Sutra*, *Lalita Sahasranamam*, *Vivekachudamani*, and *Ribhu Gita* among others. Soon after coming here he composed the *Sri Matrubbhuteswara Ashtottaram* and *Sri Ramana Suprabhatam*. Peripatetic for much of his later life, in recent years, he divided his time between Vasishta Guha and Sri Ramanasramam from 1992. At the end of September this year, however, after having been in critical condition for some weeks in a Puducherry Hospital, he requested that for a return to Ramanasramam one last time. Deemed to be in imminent danger, he was rushed back to the hospital the same evening and survived two more weeks till the 14th October. The following day, his mortal remains were interred in the lotus posture facing the Holy Hill at his samadhi in the solemn manner of a renunciate on the Perumbakkam Road, Tiruvannamalai, in the land belonging to a close disciple, about 7 kms from Sri Ramanasramam.

